

INDIAN AFTER-DINNER STORIES

BY

A. S. PANCHAPAKESA AYYAR, B.A. (Oxon), I.C.S.

D. B. TARAPOREVALA SONS & CO.
190 HORNBY ROAD, FORT
BOMBAY

1925

Supplied by :

PRINTED AT THE
DIOCESAN PRESS, MADRAS
1925. C9688

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INTRODUCTION

MAN must laugh or else he will grow prematurely old, and not all the doctors of rejuvenation can really make him young. To lose the faculty to laugh is as great a calamity as to lose the faculty to weep. Smiles and tears are Nature's great restoratives. In India there is too little healthy laughter. Tears are with us seen much oftener than smiles. This partly accounts for the fact that most Indians grow old before they are young. My primary object in writing this book is to provide some healthy laughter and at the same time to shake some of our deep-rooted prejudices by exhibiting them in their comic aspect. Many a great truth is more easily taught with a laugh than in a grave and serious discourse.

Coming to the stories themselves, the first thirty-three are not of my own creation. They are all old Indian stories though they have not the currency that they should have. It is with a view to popularizing these deserving stories that I have incorporated them in this book. These stories even have been greatly retouched to suit

my purpose. The remaining stories are, so far as I am aware, of my own creation. Of course, it is just possible that some of them are known in more or less the same forms already though I am ignorant of it. I shall be obliged to anybody who will kindly draw my attention to any really old story which has been wrongly included under the heading 'New Stories' so that I may rectify the classification in the next edition. For the benefit of non-Indian readers I have given in the foot-notes the meanings of peculiarly Indian terms.

A. S. P. AYYAR.

Indian After-Dinner Stories

OLD STORIES

I. GARGI AND THE BRAHMAGNANI¹

GARGI, the celebrated lady philosopher of ancient India, was in her usual quest for more and more knowledge. One day, she heard of a real Brahmagnani dwelling in a remote forest. Eager to profit by his conversation, she made a weary journey to that distant forest and asked one of the disciples of the Brahmagnani for permission to see his teacher. The disciple returned saying that his master was a *sanyasi*² and would see no woman. 'I see,' said Gargi smiling, 'I do not want to see him now.' The disciple went back and told his teacher what Gargi had said. The holy man was wonderstruck and was curious to know why one who had come such a long way to see him was so little disappointed at his refusal. He ran after Gargi and said, 'Why, O Gargi, why is it that you say that you don't

¹ Knower of God. Brahma=God; Gnani=Knower.

² A monk.

want to see me now, you who came such a long way with no other object but this ? ’

‘ Sir, ’ said Gargi, ‘ I was misinformed that you were a real Brahmaghani and so was anxious to see you be the trouble what it may. Now that I see that you are no real Brahmaghani, my desire to talk to you has gone. ’ ‘ How dare you say, O Gargi, that I am no real Brahmaghani ? ’ asked the Brahmaghani angrily. ‘ Because, ’ replied Gargi, ‘ A man who really knows Brahma¹ must have forgotten sex distinctions which you have not done. ’

II. GARGI AND YAGNAVALKYA²

JANAKA, the famous King of Mithila, convened an assembly of learned men and ‘ offered a gift of one thousand cows to the greatest philosopher among them all. The sage Yagnavalkya asked his disciple to drive the one thousand cows home, and no one dared to interfere. Then spoke Gargi, ‘ O Pandits, is there no one among you to challenge Yagnavalkya’s claim ? It is a shame to yield the cows to him without a fight. ’ None of the pandits replied. ‘ Gargi, ’ said

¹ God.

² An outstanding philosopher of the Upanishadic period.

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Yagnavalkya, 'there is none here to dispute my superiority.'

'I at least challenge it,' said Gargi. 'Tell me, O Yagnavalkya, who created this world and the stars, the sun and the moon and all the things which we see in this Universe?'

'God,' replied Yagnavalkya. 'And who created Him?' asked Gargi.

'Gargi, don't ask such questions,' said Yagnavalkya. 'There is a limit to questioning.'

'Who created God, that tell me definitely,' persisted Gargi.

'I don't know,' said Yagnavalkya. 'Nor does any one else know. Who created God, O Gargi?'

'By the very hypothesis, God was self-created,' declared Gargi, and won the cows.

III. SANKARACHARYA¹ AND HIS DISCIPLES

ONE day, the great Sankaracharya was walking with his disciples. The teacher wanted to test the quality of his disciples. So he got into a wayside toddy shop and drank some toddy. All his disciples did likewise. Sankaracharya said nothing. The party left the toddy shop and proceeded. They went past a bronzesmith's

¹ A celebrated philosopher of the ninth century A.D.

workshop. Sankaracharya went in and drank some of the molten bronze. His disciples stood aghast. 'Why don't you drink this as you drank the toddy?' asked Sankaracharya. 'Sir, we have not got your divine powers,' replied the disciples. 'It is even as I feared,' said the great teacher. 'You fellows imitate my vices and never my virtues.'

IV. BUDDHA AND THE HALF POMEGRANATE

THE Lord Buddha had announced that on a particular day he would receive alms with his own hands for the support of the poor and the unfortunate, and had begged all to come with whatever offerings they pleased. On the appointed day, Buddha sat at Rajagriha¹ in a conspicuous place and began receiving alms. First came King Bimbisara² with gifts of precious stones and gold coins innumerable. Buddha received them with one hand. Then came Ajatasatru³ with equally costly presents. The Lord Buddha took them also with one hand. After this several nobles, merchants and other rich men offered their gifts to the Enlightened who received them

¹ The old capital of Magadha.

² King of Magadha or modern Behar.

³ Son of Bimbisara.

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all with one hand. Then came a miserable-looking old woman with half a pomegranate in her hand. She saluted the world-teacher and said, 'Lord, I heard about your receiving alms only now. I had eaten half a pomegranate and had only this half left. I have nothing else in this world to give, so I brought this. Be pleased to accept it.' Buddha stretched forth both his hands and accepted the half pomegranate. Bimbisara, Ajatasatru and the rest were astounded. 'Oh, Blessed One,' said Bimbisara, 'inscrutable are your ways. Why did you receive this shrunken half pomegranate with both your hands whereas you received all our costly gifts only with one hand?' Buddha smiled and said, 'Oh, king, you have given costly presents but none of you gave a tenth of what you have, and this too you gave more for glory than from motives of mere charity. This woman gave her all and gave it willingly. That explains my action.'

V. BUDDHA AND THE YOUNG MOTHER

ONE day, as Buddha was sitting under a banyan tree, a young woman went weeping to him with a dead child in her hands. 'Lord,' she said, 'my first-born, my only child, is dead. Take pity on me and bring it back to life.' And she wept as

if her heart would break. The Blessed One knew the futility of reasoning with her in her then frame of mind. So he told her, 'Daughter, bring a handful of gingili seeds from a person none of whose relations have died, and I shall bring your child back to life.' The young mother was overjoyed at this seemingly simple request. She put her dead child tenderly on the lap of the world-teacher and went to the adjacent village. Her experience of the world was so little that she did not know the impossible nature of her quest. She went first to a house and knocked at the door. A young woman came. 'Will you please give me a handful of gingili seeds?' asked the young mother. 'Most willingly,' said the other and brought a handful of gingili seeds. The young mother took them and, as she was about to go, she said casually, 'I hope none of your relations have ever died.' At that the other burst into a loud moan and said, 'Why do you rake up my unhealed wounds? Don't you know that my only brother died but a month ago and that my father died only a year ago?' The young mother said, 'I am very sorry for you, but I don't want your gingili seeds.' She went to another house. She found an elderly woman there and wanted a handful of gingili seeds. The

elderly lady brought them. Before receiving them, the young mother said, 'I hope none of your relatives have died' on which the other burst out into loud lamentations saying, 'My son, my only son, the boy whom I tended for twenty long years, he died six months ago. Who are you that remind me of my misery?' The young mother said, 'I am very sorry, but I do not want your gingili seeds.' She went to another house where she found a widow aged about sixty. The young woman said, 'Mother, give me a handful of gingili seeds if none of your relatives have died.' The old widow laughed and said, 'Daughter, I shall give you ten handfuls of gingili seeds if you want, but, of course, several of my relations have died. Why, my dear husband died thirty years ago. I felt it as an inconsolable loss then. But when I come to think of it now I don't feel so sorry. Unless people die, where is the room in this world for the babes who are born every day? The world will become overcrowded like Hell. Where is your father, his father, his father, and so on? Some of these must assuredly have died. Death is the one universal event in the life of every man who is born.' The young mother felt how impossible her quest was and so returned to

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Buddha and told him about the fruitlessness of her search. 'Daughter,' said Gautama, 'go, bury your child. This is the way of the world. None can cure death here below.'

VI. BUDDHA AND BIMBISARA'S HIGH PRIEST

BIMBISARA was about to sacrifice fifty goats. His palace priest was ready for the ceremony. At that moment, Buddha entered the sacrificial room and asked Bimbisara to stay his hand since God, who created the goats, would assuredly never be pleased with their being sacrificed. Bimbisara asked Buddha to argue the point with the high priest and promised to abide by the opinion of the victor in the discussion. Buddha asked the high priest 'Why, O high priest, do you sacrifice these poor animals?'

'Fool!' returned the priest. 'Three people profit by this sacrifice and none lose by it. King Bimbisara earns merit because he is the cause of this sacrifice. I gain merit because I perform the sacrifice with my hands, and the goat, even the goat, benefits since it enters Heaven by being sacrificed. Thus three gain and none lose.'

'Do all those who are sacrificed gain Heaven?'

asked Buddha. 'Of course, yes,' replied the priest. 'There is not the least doubt about it.'

'Is your father living?' asked Buddha. 'Yes' replied the priest. 'You want him to enter Heaven, don't you?' asked Buddha. 'Of course, I do,' replied the other.

'You know that in the ordinary course of things you can't be certain about his going to Heaven,' said Buddha.

'True,' said the high priest.

'Then, why not sacrifice your father and ensure him Heaven?' asked Buddha.

The high priest was speechless with rage and tried to assault Buddha saying, 'How dare you say such things to me?'

But Bimbisara had seen on which side lay the victory. He dismissed the high priest, embraced Buddhism, and stopped the sacrifice.

VII. SANKARACHARYA AND MAYA¹

VISHNUVARDHANA, the King of the Hoysalas, was a Vaishnavite and was greatly incensed at the doctrine taught by Sankaracharya that everything here below is an illusion. He wanted to teach the exponent of this doctrine a lesson. So

¹ Maya = Illusion.

he invited the then Sankaracharya of Sringeri to his palace. That holy man went there and stoutly maintained that everything in this world was illusion. The king had arranged to let loose an infuriated elephant against Sankaracharya. The beast rushed at Sankaracharya who took to a precipitate flight to save himself.

'Oh, Venerable Sir,' shouted the king, 'why do you run so fast seeing that the elephant is only an illusion?'

'Oh, king,' said Sankaracharya in the course of his flight, 'my running too is an illusion. Everything in this world is an illusion.'

VIII. YAGNAVALKYA, JANAKA AND OTHER PUPILS

THE illustrious Yagnavalkya was teaching Janaka and eleven Brahman disciples in a forest hermitage just outside the city of Mithila.¹ The venerable teacher used to wait for Janaka in case he came a bit late to the class, an indulgence, which he never extended to the other pupils. One day, the Brahman pupils whispered among themselves, 'Our teacher talks philosophy and preaches the uttermost disregard of mere wealth

¹ Janaka's capital.

and rank. But in practice he follows the rest. See how he waits for Janaka and not for any one of us. Is it not because he is a king and we are but poor commoners?' Yagnavalkya overheard this and wanted to show them the real reason for his discrimination. He began a profound discourse on the nature of the soul, and, in the middle of it, caused Mithila to appear to be in flames by his extraordinary powers. The Brahman pupils, whose attention was not riveted in the discourse, soon saw the flames and hurriedly whispered to one another, 'Mithila is burning, Mithila is burning. Let us slip out and save what little we possess. Our teacher will not detect our absence because he is deeply immersed in his lecture.' One by one, all the eleven Brahmans slipped out and Janaka was left alone with Yagnavalkya. Yagnavalkya said to Janaka whose whole attention was in the lecture, 'O, prince, Mithila is burning. Had we not better stop?'

'No,' replied Janaka, 'go on. If Mithila is destroyed, Janaka loses nothing, for all that Janaka values is within him and not without.' Yagnavalkya continued the lecture. Soon all the other pupils returned with silly faces and said that they had been deceived and that Mithila was not really burning.

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“You see now why I wait for Janaka and not for you” said Yagnavalkya. All the eleven bowed their heads in shame and remained silent.

IX. THE ‘SANYASI’¹ AND THE PROSTITUTE

A ‘SANYASI’ sat outside a prostitute’s house and began his meditations. Soon his attention was diverted by the stream of people going daily to the prostitute’s house. His indignation knew no bounds. He said, ‘What a horrible sinner this shameless woman is!’ and began to put a stone for each man entering the house of ill-fame. The poor *sanyasi*’s lips uttered the holy words, ‘Ram! Ram!’ but his whole mind was engaged in recording the iniquities of the prostitute close by. The dancing girl, on the other hand, always said to herself, ‘What a horrible wretch am I that prostitute my body so shamelessly while a holy man is engaged in deep meditation at my very doors!’ Her mind was constantly thinking of God even though her body was engaged in most shameless immorality. In the course of time, both the *sanyasi* and the prostitute died. Contrary to his expectations, the *sanyasi* found himself in Hell and the prostitute in Heaven.

¹ A Hindu monk.

He straightaway demanded of God the reason for this. 'Your body was engaged in worshipping Me,' said God, 'but your mind was solely engaged in counting the lovers of the prostitute, whereas though the dancing girl's body was given up to vice, her mind was engaged in holy contemplation. Hence this treatment to you and to her.'

X. RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA¹ AND THE JUGGLER-

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA was walking along a road one day when he saw a fellow standing near a swollen brook and announcing to a crowd that he could easily walk across the brook without wetting his feet. Ramakrishna went to the braggart and patting him on the back said, 'My man, leave off this swag'gering. Put your faith in God and wade across the brook.' The fellow was cowed down at this unexpected advice and did as Ramakrishna had asked.

XI. MAHAVIRA AND HIS TRUEST DISCIPLE
MAHAVIRA, the founder of Jainism, had taught all his disciples that they should curb all desire, be it to see even their dearest ones at death. They were to regard all beings as alike and not to

¹ A great Hindu religious teacher of the late nineteenth century.

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discriminate. The disciple who most closely followed the great master's teaching was Paramananda. Mahavira was on his death bed at Pawa and news of this reached Paramananda at Kausambi. He hurried to Pawa, but at the gate of the city he halted. A great doubt seized him as to whether in desiring to see his teacher he was not becoming a slave to his desire. Meanwhile, the people around Mahavira told him that Paramananda had come to Pawa. The great teacher felt a bit disappointed. 'Where is he?' he asked. 'At the gates of the city, O Jina' replied the attendants. 'He is standing just outside the city engaged in deep meditation. He came here from Kausambi expressly to see you, but some doubt seems to have seized him at the gates.' After ten minutes, Mahavira again asked, 'What is Paramananda doing now?'

'Still plunged in thought, O Jina,' replied the attendants. Again, after half an hour, Mahavira enquired as to what Paramananda was doing.

'He is going back, O Jina,' replied the attendants. 'I rejoice,' said Mahavira 'I rejoice that I have got at least one disciple who practised my teachings and curbed his desire.' Shortly afterwards, the great world-teacher died with a serene smile on his lips.

XII. MAHABALI AND YUDHISTIRA

KING YUDHISTIRA was very proud of his charity in feeding 16008 Brahmins every day from the magic all-providing pot which he had. All these Brahmins used to follow him wherever he went and eat the sumptuous meals given to them gratis. Sri Krishna wanted to humble Yudhistira's pride. One day, He took him to the underworld where the righteous King Mahabali ruled. Mahabali received the Lord Krishna with all proper worship. Sri Krishna told Mahabali, 'This is my cousin Yudhistira.' At once, Mahabali went and most respectfully invited Yudhistira to his kingdom.

'Ah!' said Sri Krishna to Mahabali, 'you don't know the full glories of my cousin who is the abode of charity. He feeds 16008 Brahmins gratis three times every day and they follow him wherever he goes.'

'Pooh!' said Mahabali spitting on the ground. 'What a wretch he must be to keep 16008 people so helplessly dependent on him simply to satisfy his vanity! Even if I offer a kingdom, no man will come to me every day three times shamelessly for meals. Oh, Lord, is this cousin of yours the abode of charity, the Model King of whom I have heard so much?' Yudhistira was humbled to the dust at this well-merited reproach.

XIII. ARJUNA'S BOAST

JUST before the Mahabharata War, Krishna and Arjuna were taking a walk by the side of the Jumna. Arjuna was getting overweeningly proud of his archery. He asked Krishna why Rama should have taken so much pain to construct a land bridge to Ceylon when a bridge of arrows could have quite easily taken all his troops across. 'Perhaps,' he added, 'Rama was not after all so great an archer. I could have easily managed to transport all the troops with a bridge of arrows.' 'The troops of Rama were enormous in size,' said Sri Krishna.

'What if?' asked Arjuna.

'Well, then,' said Sri Krishna intending to teach Arjuna a lesson. 'There is just one soldier of Rama left still. You construct a bridge of arrows and transport him at least across this Jumna.'

'How ridiculously easy!' said Arjuna and soon constructed a bridge of arrows across the river. Sri Krishna called Hanuman¹ and asked him to cross the river by the bridge. Hanuman shrugged his shoulders. 'Arjuna, Hanuman perhaps thinks

¹ The famous monkey-god, a soldier and devotee of Rama.

that the bridge is not strong enough. Please see whether your bridge is perfect.'

'Perfect,' replied Arjuna. 'It is the unfamiliarity which causes this misgiving in Hanuman.'

'Hanuman, cross the bridge without fear,' ordered Sri Krishna. Hanuman placed his foot on the bridge of arrows which came tumbling down into the river with a crash. The monkey jumped back to the shore in disgust.

Arjuna threw down his mighty bow and arrows and declared that after such a disgrace he was unfit to fight again.

'Don't be dejected, Arjuna,' said Krishna. 'Even Rama could not do it. What wonder then if you failed? Come, pick up your bow and arrows and don't try to belittle the famous warriors of old hereafter.'

XIV. BHIMA AND HEAVEN

BHIMA¹ was very proud of his muscular strength. He thought that none could excel him in all the three worlds. One day, Krishna took all the Pandava brothers and Draupadi to Heaven for sight-seeing. Krishna took the four brothers and Draupadi² with him leaving Bhima to come by

¹ A famous hero in the Mahabharata.

² The wife of the Pandavas.

himself since he had nothing to fear from the gate-keepers owing to his known ability to defeat them. Krishna took all the five in and both the gate-keepers kept quiet on seeing Him. When the party had seen everything to be seen there, Draupadi reminded Krishna that Bhima had not come. 'Perhaps, he has already killed the poor gate-keepers' suggested Krishna. Coming outside, they found the gate-keepers sleeping at their posts and Bhima and his club getting into the nostrils of one or the other of them at inspiration and getting out again at expiration, the gate-keepers being not so much as aware of his presence there. Poor Bhima looked a miserable spectacle. Krishna saw that Bhima had been sufficiently humbled, took pity on him, woke up the gate-keepers and released Bhima from his agony.

XV. THE SEVEN HEAVENS AND THE WHEEL

A BRAHMAN died and went to heaven as a result of his good acts in life. God showed him all the beauties of Heaven. When He had finished, the Brahman said, 'Oh, Lord, all this is delightful beyond imagination. But is there no greater Heaven than this?'

'There is,' said Vishnu¹ and took the Brahman higher up to the second Heaven which was a hundred times more enchanting than the first. 'Are you satisfied now?' asked Vishnu. 'Yes,' replied the Brahman, 'But is there no higher Heaven than this?' 'Yes,' said Vishnu and took him to the third Heaven which was a hundred times more enchanting than the second. Even with this the Brahman was not satisfied, but kept on enquiring whether there was no higher Heaven than the last one visited. So Vishnu took the Brahman successively to the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh heavens, each of which was a hundred times more enchanting than the preceding one. At last, after showing the Brahman round the seventh Heaven, Vishnu asked him, 'Are you satisfied at least now?' 'Let us go higher up,' said the Brahman. 'Alright,' said Vishnu and took the Brahman above the seventh Heaven. There was nothing there but the wheel of existence on which turned the universe. As soon as the Brahman went up, his shoulders stuck to the cosmic wheel and he was unable to extricate himself. 'Infinite greed will lead to endless misery,' said Vishnu and disappeared.

¹ A form of God.

XVI. THE ELEPHANT-REMOVER AND
A MEASURE OF RICE

THERE was once a sturdy youth of twenty called Sankar who had absolutely no cares. His mother did everything for him and never allowed him to worry about anything. Sankar used to take his meal and wander about till another meal was ready. He was so strong that whenever the king's elephant crossed his path he used to easily lift it up, put it on one side, and pass on, and all this with no apparent effort. One morning, King Vikramaditya saw this being done from his palace window and was immensely surprised. He asked his minister, Bhatti, as to what the secret of this achievement was. 'His mind is free, sire,' said Bhatti. 'Hence his extraordinary strength. Put some care into him, and he will become as weak as any the rest of us.'

'Let us see that,' said Vikramaditya. So Bhatti went to the youth's mother and offered her a hundred gold coins if she would but tell her son the next time he came for meals that no meals could be prepared for lack of rice and that he should bring a measure of rice home every day. The old lady agreed to do so readily not realizing the consequences to her son. At noon Sankar

came as usual and bawled out, 'Mother, are not meals ready? I feel awfully hungry.'

'Son,' said the old lady, 'there is no rice left for preparing meals. You should somehow earn and bring a measure of rice per day for our meals.'

Sankar's face fell. How was he to earn a measure of rice per day? He left the house and wandered about plunged in thought as to how he was to earn the measure of rice per day. His face wore none of the joyous look of old, but had the darkness of great anxiety. Vikramaditya and Bhatti watched him wandering from the palace window and were greatly surprised at the change in his face. A cat was coming opposite Sankar, and Sankar, who would not make way for an elephant, made way for the cat and went aside. The state-elephant was purposely sent by the king to meet Sankar. The animal went in the middle of the road expecting to be lifted as usual. Sankar wanted to go aside, but the elephant again waylaid him in order to have its daily lift. At last, Sankar tried to lift the elephant and put it aside, but his hands stuck to the elephant's sides powerless to lift the huge bulk up. Sankar was dismayed at this, and even the elephant looked with wondering eyes at this strange exhibition of utter weakness in a man which it

had known to be so strong in the past. 'You are right,' said Vikramaditya to Bhatti. 'Care is the great enemy of strength.'

XVII. DUSHYANTA AND THE UNBORN CHILD

KING DUSHYANTA was one day holding court when his minister announced that a very rich merchant had died in his dominions leaving only a pregnant wife behind and that therefore the whole property of the dead man would vest in the king.

'Why, what about the unborn child?' asked Dushyanta.

'Sire, it cannot inherit anything since it will have no father alive when it is born,' replied the minister.

'Let them proclaim all over the land that the king is the father of all unborn children,' said Dushyanta. 'Thus shall every posthumous child have a father living when it is born.'

XVIII. THE LITTLE ELDER BROTHER

CLOSE to a forest lived a poor lonely widow called Janaki with her only child Rama. When Rama grew to be seven years old, Janaki wanted to put him to school. There was a revered *guru*¹

¹ Teacher.

on the other side of the forest. Janaki wanted to send her son Rama there. When she told Rama about this, the boy was afraid. 'Mother,' said he, 'how am I to cross the forest? Will you come with me every day?' 'No, child,' replied Janaki. 'If I come with you, who is to look after the home and earn the living? But there is your little elder brother in the forest. Whenever you feel afraid, call out, "Little elder brother!" and he will come to you.'

'Mother,' said Rama, 'why does he always live in the forest?'

'Because he likes to do so,' replied Janaki. 'Don't ask him about this since he may not come to you again.'

'I won't, mother,' said Rama. 'Now I do not fear the forest. I shall go to school from to-day.' So Rama started for the school. As soon as he entered the forest, his heart failed him and he was filled with fear. At once he called out, 'Little elder brother! little elder brother!' at the top of his voice. A boy of sixteen came with a flute in his hand and said to Rama, 'What do you want?'

'I want to go to the school across the forest,' said Rama, 'and I want you to accompany me to the other side of the forest.' 'Alright,' said the other and accompanied Rama across the forest

playing on his flute all the time. When Rama reached the other side of the forest, the little elder brother left him. Rama went to the school and was enrolled as a pupil by the good *guru*.

‘Child, how do you come across the forest?’ asked the *guru*. ‘My little brother accompanies me,’ said Rama. ‘What does he do?’ asked the *guru*.

‘He lives in the forest and tends cattle,’ said Rama.

‘I see,’ said the *guru*. After that, every day Rama used to go to the school. In the forest he was always joined by the little brother. Days passed, and one day the *guru*’s daughter’s marriage was announced. Every pupil wanted to present the *guru* with something on this occasion. Rama also wanted to give something. So he went to Janaki that evening and said, ‘Mother, my *guru*’s daughter is going to be married tomorrow, and every one of my classmates is going to give some present or other. Give me something so that I too may make a present to show my gratitude to my *guru*.’

Janaki said, ‘Child, I am too poor to give you anything, but you can ask your little elder brother in the forest. Perhaps, he may give you some-

'Alright, I shall ask him,' said Rama. The next day, as soon as the little elder brother joined him in the forest, Rama put his difficulty before him and wanted him to give him something to present to the *guru* on the occasion of his daughter's marriage. The little elder brother gave Rama a cocoanutshell full of milk and asked him to give it to the *guru*. Rama, nothing abashed, took the cocoanutshell full of milk, thanked his elder brother, and went straight to the school with the milk in his right hand. By the time he reached the school, the auspicious hour was approaching. All had assembled including the bride and bridegroom. All the fellow-pupils of Rama were making costly presents. One, a prince, gave a pair of gold garlands. Another, a merchant's son, gave a string of matchless pearls for the bride. Another gave a cartload of pumpkins, another ten casks of curds and so on and so forth. Without the least feeling of shame, Rama went amidst this crowd and stood in front of the *guru*.

'What is it, child?' asked the *guru*.

'I have brought this present,' said Rama, and showed the cocoanutshell of milk to the *guru*. The venerable man smiled and said, 'Thank you, my child. His mother is too poor to ...'

anything more,' he said turning to his men. 'Come, pour this into a vessel, for nothing which is offered with a full heart should be refused,' said the *guru* to one of his men. The wicked attendant wanted to spite the poor boy and hold him up to ridicule. Amidst general laughter he poured the cocoanutshell of milk into a huge empty cistern. What was his surprise and the surprise of the audience when the milk continued to flow from the cocoanutshell till it filled the cistern and overflowed and flooded the pandal! Everybody was amazed.

'Child,' said the *guru* to Rama, 'where did you get this cocoanutshell of milk from?'

'From my little elder brother who lives in the forest near by, tending the cows and playing the flute,' replied Rama.

'What is his name?' asked the *guru*.

'I don't know,' said Rama. 'He never comes home. He is always in the forest tending his cows and playing his flute.'

'It must be the Lord Govinda¹ Himself,' exclaimed the *guru*. 'All these years I have devoted myself to religious study and never once have I seen Him, but this child has been seeing

¹ A name of Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity. The ~~name~~ as Krishna.

Him every day. Child, where is He? Can you show Him to me?' 'Of course, I can. Come along,' said Rama, and the *guru* followed. All the rest followed also, the pupils, the priests, even the bride and the bridegroom, all filled with a desire to see Sri Krishna in bodily form. When they reached the forest, Rama called out, 'Little elder brother, little elder brother!' Nobody came. Again Rama cried out, 'Little elder brother, little elder brother, where are you? It is Rama who is calling,' and Rama burst into tears. Then a voice came from afar and it said, 'I come only at the call of the weak and the helpless, of the simple and the believing. I come only to the lonely soul in distress and not to crowds assembled to see Me. Till to-day you were simple and believed that I was really your elder brother. So I appeared to you in human form and played with you. Hereafter that is impossible. You will see your little elder brother no more.'

XIX. THE SERPENT AND 'SANYASA' ¹

A SERPENT turned suddenly religious and wanted to forsake its old evil ways. It went and

¹ A life of renunciation and non-violence

consulted a saint as to what it should do. The saint advised it to plunge in deep meditation and resolve to do not the least harm to any living being however great the provocation. The serpent adopted the advice. It resolved never to cause any the least harm to any living being. It went near a temple and lay down in deep meditation on the grass by the side of the road. At first people ran away as soon as they saw the serpent, but, since it did not hiss or run after them, they began to become more courageous. By and by, children crowded round it saying, 'This is no serpent, this is some worthless reptile resembling a serpent, or, perhaps, it is an altogether old and decrepit serpent. Come, let us stone it to our hearts' content and pull it about.' Then the children threw lots of sharp pebbles on the devoted serpent whose body was bruised severely. Still the serpent kept to its resolve of absolute non-violence and did nothing. But the children did not stop here. They lost all fear of the serpent and beat it mercilessly with a stick, tied a rope round its head and dragged it about the streets shouting out, 'look, look' to the people in the houses. Not a single soul interfered on behalf of the serpent. At last, late in the evening, the children dragged the

serpent to its original place near the temple and said, 'It is getting late to-day. We shall come again to-morrow.' The poor serpent lay half dead for some time. Then, after it had gained sufficient strength to crawl about, it went to the saint and said, 'See how many miseries I have to suffer if I never do the least harm to anybody!' 'Why couldn't you hiss?' asked the saint. 'That will not be doing harm to anybody, but will, at the same time, save you from your tormentors. God does not forbid a hiss in self-defence.' The serpent went back. Early next morning, the children came with a thorny stick to the place where it was, shouting out, 'Where is the good old snake? Let us drag it along to-day and drive it with thorns.' 'Gaaa,' said the serpent raising its head. 'The serpent is hissing, the serpent is hissing!' said the children, and ran in panic flight one or two of them even tumbling down on the way. Never again did the children go anywhere near the serpent which was left undisturbed in its meditation thereafter.

XX. THE MOTHER-IN-LAW, THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AND THE BEGGAR

A BEGGAR went to a house and asked for alms. The senior lady of the house, the mother-in-law,

was just then absent, and only her daughter-in-law was present. The daughter-in-law refused alms to the beggar, and the latter was going away sullenly when he saw the mother-in-law returning. 'Why are you coming away from our house?' asked the mother-in-law of the beggar. 'Because your daughter-in-law refused all alms,' said the beggar. 'Did she?' asked the mother-in-law in wrath. 'What right has she to refuse alms in my house? I am the mistress of the house, not she. Come along, my man, never take a refusal from nobodies. The mistress of the house is the only person who can say you ay or nay.'

'You are the incarnation of charity itself,' said the beggar in joy, and followed the mother-in-law to the house. The mother-in-law called out her daughter-in-law and asked her whether it was a fact that she had refused alms to the beggar. The poor daughter-in-law pleaded guilty wondering why the mother-in-law took so much interest in a beggar that day.

'Wretch,' said the mother-in-law, 'how dare you refuse alms when you know that I am the mistress here and the person entitled to give or refuse? Come here, my man,' she said turning to the eagerly expectant beggar, 'I, as mistress

of the house, refuse you all alms. Hereafter, never take a refusal except from the mistress of the house. Now you may go away.' And the poor beggar slunk away in sheer shame and chagrin.

XXI. THE KING AND THE SCULPTOR

A mighty King of Kalinga constructed the great temple of Jagannath at the cost of many lakhs of rupees. After he finished it, he advertised for a sacred sculptor who would make an idol worthy of the temple. The reward for so doing it was put at one hundred thousand rupees and the punishment for failing in the enterprise was death. None offered himself for a long time. At last, one day, an old sculptor came and offered to do it on one condition.

'What is that?' asked the king.

'Nobody except me should come into the temple for full thirty days under whatsoever pretext. If this condition is kept, I shall make an idol which will look just like the real Jagannatha, the Lord of the Universe.'

The king was delighted. 'What an easy condition!' he said. 'I agree to it readily.' Then the sculptor shut himself up in the temple with provisions, etc., for a month and closed the massive gates. Day after day, the king and the

citizens heard a thundering noise within the temple. 'Why should he make so much noise?' asked the king of his courtiers on the tenth day. 'After all, he is making but one idol. Such a noise was not heard even when the whole temple was being constructed, and there were five thousand men working then, not one.'

'It is strange,' replied the courtiers. 'Shall we go in and see?'

'No,' said the king. 'For thirty days I have promised that none should enter the temple.'

But the noise became louder and louder every day. The king became more and more anxious as to what was happening. On the twentieth day, he again asked the courtiers:—

'Whatever could this be?' 'This noise is becoming quite inexplicable.'

'Perhaps the old fellow is breaking all the stone pillars,' suggested one courtier.

'What!' replied the king. 'Has the devil come to destroy my good temple? What shall we do? I have promised not to enter the temple for thirty days.'

'Sire,' said one courtier, 'let us go to the temple doors and call him out. There is no harm in that. We can then ascertain from him what all this noise means.'

‘Excellent,’ said the king. ‘Let us go at once.’

So they all went to the temple doors and called out for the sculptor. Absolutely no answer came. The dreadful noise continued. The king asked his drummers and trumpeters to ply their instruments. Still, no answer; the noise inside only grew the louder. ‘Let us enter,’ said the minister.

‘No,’ said the king. ‘For thirty days I have promised not to enter the temple. If I do, the glorious image promised may be lost.’

So the party returned to the palace. That night, the noise became even more thundering, and continued right through the night. Early in the morning, the king called his ministers and courtiers and asked, ‘Whatever is this? Till now, the noise was heard only during the day, now it is heard at nights also.’

‘Sire,’ replied a minister, ‘it looks as if the whole city will fall down. Why not we go at once and break in?’

‘If we do,’ said the king, ‘the glorious image promised may be lost.’

‘But, sire,’ replied the minister, ‘if we don’t, our glorious temple may be blown to atoms by this wretch. Even if we don’t get the promised image, let us at least retain our realized temple.’

The king's fears were thoroughly roused. 'True,' he said, 'perhaps the wretch is breaking everything in our temple. Otherwise, I can't see why he should make so much noise for making one idol. Besides, the noise is heard at nights. How can he work at night without a light?'

'No light is required, sire, for breaking pillars,' said the minister.

'Ah,' said the king, 'that is the secret of the whole thing. Come, let us break the doors and enter. Even if the doors are damaged, let us save what we can of the rest of the temple.' Saying this, all went to the temple doors which were bolted from the inside. The king had them forced open, and entered into the temple with his ministers and courtiers. He saw the old sculptor stooping near a misshapened idol defective in limbs and ugly to look at.

'Wretch,' said the king. 'Is this the idol of Jagannath, Lord of the Universe, which you promised? You shall be beheaded for this.'

'Sire' said the sculptor with a smile, 'your condition is not fulfilled. This is only the twenty-first day. O presumptuous man, couldn't you have held your soul in patience even for thirty days for seeing the real form of the Lord of the Universe?'

The king felt ashamed of his conduct. Nothing in the temple had been interfered with by the sculptor. He looked at the miserable idol and said, 'What can we do with this now?'

'Put it in the temple and worship it,' said the sculptor. 'The Lord resides in the ugly as much as He does in the beautiful and in the defective limbed as in the well-limbed. His worshippers will realize this from this idol.' Saying this, the sculptor who was none else than the Lord of the Universe, disappeared.

XXII. THE MERCHANT AND THE FOOL

A MERCHANT wanted to go on a long business journey. His way lay through a forest. So he wanted to take somebody with him for help. Several people demanded fifty rupees. The merchant was not willing to pay so much. At last, a fool offered to go for ten rupees. The merchant closed in with the offer and paid the ten rupees then and there. The fool tied the rupees up in a corner of his loin cloth and accompanied the merchant on his journey. The merchant had five hundred rupees with him in a bag. Towards dusk, both of them reached the forest which was notoriously infested with a well-known band of robbers. The merchant saw the robber

band coming at a distance and asked the fool quickly to hide himself in some bush adjoining the path. The merchant hid himself securely in a bush, but the fool hid so clumsily that though his head was in the bush his legs were protruding on the path. The robber chieftain was coming in front on his horse and the rest were following on theirs. Since it was getting dark, the robber chief could not see the fool's exposed legs, but, as luck would have it, his horse stumbled on the outstretched legs.

'My men,' said the chief to his followers, 'take care. There is a horrible root of a tree here.'

'I say,' said the fool indignantly, 'how dare you call my legs roots? They are anyday better than yours.' The robber chief was amazed. The fool was soon secured.

'Have you got any money with you?' asked the chief.

'Fellow, do you take me for a pauper?' asked the fool. 'I have got ten rupees tied up here,' and he pointed to the knot in his loin cloth.

The robbers untied the knot and found ten rupees as the fool had predicted. 'My men,' said the robber chief, 'these rupees must be counterfeit. Otherwise, will any fellow give out where he has his money?'

'Fellow,' said the fool indignantly, 'I am not a dishonest rascal like you. I got these rupees honestly from an honest merchant. If you have any more doubt about it, go and ask him. He is hiding in yonder bush with five hundred rupees and not one of them counterfeit.'

The robbers searched the bush indicated, hauled up the unfortunate merchant, robbed him of his five hundred rupees and sent him packing.

XXIII. THE MAN-KILLER

TWO friends were walking together one morning in a lonely place when they saw a philosopher running away in panic haste from a bush. They asked him why he was so frightened. He said, 'In yonder bush I saw the man-killer.' 'Do you mean a tiger?' asked the two frightened.

'No,' replied the philosopher. 'It is far more dangerous than a tiger. I unearthed it when I was uprooting some herbs.' 'What is it?' asked the two. 'A heap of gold coins,' replied the philosopher. 'Where is it? Where is it?' asked both in the same breath. 'There, in that bush,' said the philosopher and went his way. The two friends rushed to the spot indicated and found a heap of gold coins.

'What fools these philosophers are,' said one

to the other, 'to call life-giving gold a man-killer!'

'Well,' said the other, 'let us consider what we should do. It is unsafe to carry it into our village now in public daylight because the people will come to know of it. Let one of us remain here to watch the treasure while another goes to fetch the meals.'

So it was agreed. One remained behind to guard the treasure while the other went to bring the meals.

When his comrade had gone for bringing the meals, the man left behind thought thus: 'It is a pity that I was not alone this day. Now I have got to give half the gold to my friend, and the quantity of gold is not very much either. I have a big family and need all the gold. As soon as the fellow comes, I shall take him by surprise and kill him with my knife. Nobody will know about this and I shall get the whole gold.' With this he sharpened his knife and got ready.

The other man meanwhile thought, 'Why should I give half the gold to this man? I am heavily in debt and have made no provision at all for old age. The other has no debts and has got some wealthy relations. I shall not give him half, that is certain. I shall take my meals and

mix some deadly poison in the meals I carry for him. He will eat it and die, and nobody will be any the wiser for it. Thus I shall get all the gold.' So saying, the man took his meals and mixed some deadly poison in the meals meant for the other. Then, taking the poisoned meal, he went to the place where the treasure was. As soon as he approached the spot, the other rushed upon him unexpectedly with his knife and despatched him in no time. After committing this atrocious crime, he said, 'Poor fellow, half the gold was the cause of his death. Now, let me take my meals. I feel beastly hungry.' He unsuspectingly took the poisoned meals brought by his friend and in half an hour died an agonizing death. 'How true the philosopher's remark was!' said he with his dying breath.

XXIV. AN AFTER-DINNER ADVENTURE

A SIMPLE unsophisticated man called Govind was taking a short walk in a forest close to his house after his midday meals. He was in the best humour imaginable. After walking for some time, Govind saw a man catching hold of a tiger's tail through the forked branches of a huge tree. The animal was desperately trying to make itself free, but the man was holding it in an iron grip

and the tree was preventing it from biting him. Still, the man's strength was fast ebbing. He called out to Govind and said, 'Brother, hold this tail for a little while till I go back and fetch the rope which this wretched animal of mine threw off while I was bringing it through this forest.'

'How long do you want me to hold it?' asked Govind. 'For ten minutes,' replied the other, 'The rope dropped off just a furlong from here and I had to rush after the tiger and catch its tail lest I should lose it altogether.' 'Alright,' said Govind, 'go and fetch the rope quickly. I shall hold the tail for ten minutes.' With this, Govind caught tight hold of the tiger's tail. The other left the spot and went amidst the trees till he was out of sight. Then he got up a lofty tree and seated himself securely on one of the branches saying, 'But for that fool I would have been killed to-day.'

Govind waited for ten minutes, but there was no sign of the other man or his rope. Govind also was getting terribly exhausted by his unedifying occupation. When ten minutes were past, Govind shouted out several times, 'I say, come quick, or I shall let your tiger go.' No reply came. 'Why should I take so much

trouble about that fellow's beast when he himself cares so little about it? He deserves to lose it for his indifference,' said Govind to himself at last indignantly and let go the tail. The infuriated tiger sprang upon Govind at once and tore him to pieces.

XXV. SIVA ! SIVA !

THERE was a Brahman convert to Christianity in one of the South Indian towns. He had been a Saivite before conversion, but had been a pious Christian for thirty years. At fifty, he was so imbued with the teachings of his new religion that he publicly boasted that there was nothing left of the old religion in him and challenged anybody to show him any such remnant. A young psychologist took up the challenge. He asked the convert whether he would agree to even painful tests. The convert replied that he would agree to any test however painful. The psychologist asked the convert to shut his eyes for ten minutes which he did. Then he had red-hot irons brought and branded the convert's right foot with a red hot iron suddenly. The convert unconsciously cried out in agonizing pain, 'Siva! Siva! Siva! Siva!' as the hot iron burnt into his flesh.

'Ah,' said the psychologist triumphantly, 'the beliefs of your childhood have prevailed over the convictions of later years. You called upon Siva in your agony and not upon Christ.'

XXVI. AKBAR AND THE COW

THE Emperor Akbar was one day so impressed with his own power and glory that he asked his courtiers whether there was anything which he could not do. The court wit Birbal said, 'Sire, you cannot give all that even a baby wants.'

'What?' asked Akbar in anger, 'can't I even satisfy a child's cravings, I the mighty emperor of all this empire?'

'I stick to my words, O king,' said Birbal. 'If Your Majesty wants, we can have a trial to-morrow. I shall personate a baby.'

'Alright,' said Akbar. 'So be it.'

The next day, every requisite of babies was got ready at the emperor's orders. Huge cans of milk, tins and tins of all kinds of sweetmeats and eatables were all got ready. At the appointed hour, Birbal was put in a cradle and brought before the emperor.

'What do you want?' asked the emperor.

'I want some freshly drawn cow's milk,' said Birbal.

'Is that all?' said Akbar relieved very much. He got an excellent cow and had a seer of milk milked in no time.

'What do you want now?' asked Akbar of Birbal.

'Oh, put the milk back again into the udder,' said Birbal crying like a child. Akbar stood dumbfounded and confessed his defeat by his silence.

XXVII. THE KING AND THE ACTOR

A certain King of Travancore was once told by his minister that a very good actor had come to his city.

'What part does he act?' asked the king.

'The part of Ravana,'¹ replied the minister. 'He plays the part of Ravana most excellently. By his bearing, one can realize how the real Ravana acted.'

'I see,' said the king. 'What is the play?'

'The embassy of Rama to Ravana,' replied the minister. 'Let him give a performance at the palace,' said the king. So a performance was arranged. The actor wanted to show the

¹ The powerful Demon King of Lanka and enemy of Rama.

best that was in him. Seated on his mighty stage throne, he was hurling defiance at Rama. Just as he uttered the sentence, 'There is no King on earth to whom I will ever deign to offer a seat, all, all are my vassals or should be,' the King of Travancore went in state with his ministers and generals to take his seat among the audience. The actor who was playing part of Ravana stood up and bowed to the monarch.

'Pshaw!' said the king to his minister. 'Is this the actor you praised so much? The man who represents Ravana, who defied even the mightiest of kings, rises and bows down to a prince like me!' and walked out in disgust.

XXVIII. TULASI DAS AND HIS WIFE

THE celebrated Hindi poet and saint Tulasi Das was in early youth neither a poet nor a devotee. His one outstanding quality then was an extraordinary attachment to his wife. One day, when his wife had gone on a short holiday to her father's house, Tulasi found it so unbearable to live without her for even a single night that he went to his father-in-law's house. On the way, he had to cross the mighty Jumna. It was dark, and the river was in floods. Tulasi got upon a piece of floating timber and got to the other side with

'What will you have this time, the portion above ground or the portion below ground?' asked the rogue of the fool. 'The portion below ground,' replied the fool emphatically. So it was agreed to. This time also the fool got for his immense pains absolutely nothing when the crop was harvested.

XXX. THE MINISTER AND THE PEON

ONE day, a king of Travancore overheard his peon mutter to himself, 'This is an unjust age. I who work all day long am paid seven rupees per month whereas the minister who rolls about in motor cars and idles the whole time is paid two thousand rupees per month. What injustice!' The king wanted to show the peon the injustice of his remarks. Just then, he saw a palanquin in the distance and asked the peon to go and enquire who it was who was travelling in the palanquin. The peon went running and came back and said: 'It is Sankaracharya.' 'Of which Mutt' ¹ asked the king. The peon went running again and came back panting and said, 'Of Sringeri Mutt.' ² 'Where is His

¹ A Hindu monastery.

² A famous monastery in Mysore.

Holiness coming from?' asked the king. Again ran the peon and came back and said, 'From Shencottah.' 'Where does he go to?' asked the king. The peon took another trip and came back and said, 'The Holiness is going to Kalandi.' 'Is His Holiness going to stop here?' asked the king. Again ran the peon and came back and said, 'Yes.' 'For how long?' asked the king. The peon had another exhausting run and came back tired and said 'For a day.'

'Where does he intend to stop?' asked the king. The exhausted peon again ran to the palanquin which was going further and further and came back and said, 'In the Mutt attached to the temple.' • • •

'Will His Holiness be able to see me?' asked the king. The peon had an even more exhausting journey and came back and said, 'Yes.'

'When?' asked the king. Again, the peon dragged his weary body to the palanquin which was now nearing the Mutt and came and said, 'At 3 p.m.' and fell down in a heap utterly exhausted even in the presence of the king. The king sent for his minister, who had not witnessed any of the above incidents, and asked him to go and enquire who had come in

a palanquin that morning. The minister returned in half an hour and in the presence of the peon told the king, 'Sire, it is the Sankaracharya of Sringeri Mutt. His Holiness came from Shencottah and is going to Kaladi. He will be stopping at the local Mutt for a day and will be able to see Your Highness at 3 p.m. to-day. If possible, His Holiness will also conduct the service at the temple this evening.' 'You see,' said the king turning to the peon, 'what took you nine weary journies and five hours has taken the minister only half an hour and one single journey. Now you see the reason why you are paid only seven rupees and he two thousand rupees.' The peon stood confounded with shame.

XXXI. A NECK-OUT

A BEGGAR persisted in remaining at a house begging for alms in spite of orders to clear out and showers of abuse. At last, the owner of the house got irritated and literally necked the beggar out. As the house-owner disengaged his hand from the neck of the beggar, his hand necessarily had to make a swing which ordinarily passes also for the mute sign 'Come.' The beggar came back and asked, 'Did you call me back, Sir?'

XXXII. A HIGH-SOUNDING THREAT

ONE day, a man went to a feast uninvited. The giver of the feast was not a little annoyed at this unexpected intruder of questionable status and so at first refused him food. 'If you refuse me food, I shall do what I did at a neighbouring village the other day where they had the audacity to deny me food at a feast. Remember that and then do as you like,' said the stranger. The host was cowed down at the mysterious threat and did not want any untoward thing to happen in his house. So he put up with the inconvenience and gave the pugnacious stranger a good meal. After the meals were over, when all were taking betel leaves, the host asked of the stranger, 'Sir, will you tell us what you did at the other village when they had the audacity to refuse you meals?' 'I starved,' was the laconic reply.

XXXIII. A RESOURCEFUL HOUSEHOLDER

A MAN called Krishna and his wife were living alone in a house. One evening, as the couple were sitting in the hall, the husband descried a well-known ex-convict of most desperate character hiding in the loft. To shout out would mean certain escape of the marauder and possibly also some hurt at his hands before help could come.

Not to shout out would mean robbery at night accompanied with violence. At last, a brilliant idea struck the husband. There was a sturdy neighbour called Rama who had caught many thieves before. The husband told his wife, 'My dear, you are pregnant now. You will deliver a child soon. If it turns out to be a male, as I expect it will be, I shall name it Rama, and at the age of five I shall send it to school. I shall insist that it should come home every day at 5.30 p.m. precisely.'

'What if he does not come at that time?' asked the wife. 'I shall shout out, "Rama, Rama,"' replied the husband shouting out 'Rama' in a loud voice.

'What if he does not come still?' asked the wife. 'I shall shout out again, "Rama," "Rama," "Rama," "Rama," till he comes,' replied the husband shouting out the name, 'Rama' at the top of his voice. The neighbour Rama and others came rushing to the house hearing the shouts and enquired of the husband as to what the matter was. 'Somebody in the loft wants you,' replied the husband pointing to the ex-convict who was speedily secured, put up for trial before a court and sentenced to serve a long term.

The ex-convict swore vengeance on the resourceful man who had brought about his arrest. One day, shortly after his release, he hid himself in the rubbish pit outside the house in order to escape all chances of detection. When Krishna went to rinse his mouth after meals at the rubbish heap as usual, he perceived a slight movement in the rubbish heap as the water fell on it. His suspicions were fully roused. He asked his wife to bring pot after pot of water and continued to rinse his mouth and eject the water on the rubbish heap where the ex-convict was concealed. The ex-convict, determined not to be found out this time, kept absolutely motionless in spite of the shower bath he was receiving. But Krishna's wife, not knowing the reason for her husband's strange action asked him, 'Has your mouth turned a gutter that you rinse it so many times? I cannot bring any more water.' On which, Krishna spat one mouthful of water on her. The poor woman raised a loud hue and cry fully believing that her husband had gone mad. Rama and all other neighbours came running and enquired of Krishna as to what the matter was. 'This wretched woman,' said Krishna, 'whom I feed and clothe raised all this alarm because I spat at her once whereas this man here

(pointing to the concealed robber) whom I never once fed or clothed has patiently borne at least a hundred spittings without one word of murmur.' The assembled villagers at once secured the concealed marauder who was once again put up before a magistrate and this time sentenced to a good long term of hard labour.

NEW STORIES

XXXIV. THE BRAHMAN WHO WENT TO SINGAPUR

A BRAHMAN clerk was drawing a pay of twenty-five rupees per month in Malabar. His wife was by her skilful management of the household just managing to make both ends meet after leaving a small saving per month for unforeseen emergencies. The husband and wife were happy in their relations with one another, and their two small children were brought up under the fostering care of both the parents. One day, the clerk had an offer of a post in Singapur at one hundred and fifty rupees per month. The couple were delighted, and resolved to leave the land of their ancestors and settle in Singapur since that would solve their financial troubles. They arrived at Singapur and everything went well for a month. The wife laid big plans for effecting enormous

savings. Visions of a bright future floated before her eyes. But as the months passed the poor lady found her husband associating with evil characters and taking to drink and to women. Never more did she receive the loving caresses of old. Even the poor little dears, her children, were left uncared for. The one and only attraction of her husband seemed to be the taverns and brothels so notoriously numerous in that city. All his boasted pay hardly sufficed even to pay his liquor bills and brothel expenses. The fellow even drew upon the small capital saved so industriously by his wife in India and soon exhausted it. He began pawning his wife's jewels till all of them were also exhausted. No remonstrance, however moving, of his wife had any the least effect on him. The poor lady realized too late how foolish she had been in going to Singapur and regretted the good old days in India. At last, she realized that money was not every thing, that man was more important than money, but then it was all too late.

XXXV. THE COOLY WHO WENT TO ASSAM

A POOR cooly from Madras accustomed to get eight annas for a day's hard work heard enchanting stories about Assam tea plantations from a

recruiting Sirdar. He was to get a rupee per day, and free rice, free quarters and free medical attendance in addition. The ignorant cooly was easily gulled into going to Assam. The stay in the emigration depot destroyed some of the enchantment, the journey to Assam destroyed a little more, and work for a month in the tea plantations completely dispelled the illusion. The poor cooly had to work hard and never got more than eight annas per day; free rice and free quarters he never saw. He lost the freedom of his Madras home and became an inmate of labour barracks. He became a prey to malaria and other fell diseases, and he was separated from his family by two thousand miles of forbidding land. The poor cooly often wished to return to his wife and children but he had not the wherewithal to pay his way back. So he lived in alien Assam for a year in deep sorrow and broken spirits till one day a kind providence took him into its bosom, and the weary exile died dreaming of the southern fields.

XXXVI. LAKSHMI'S CHARKA¹

LAKSHMI one day suddenly resolved to study English. For three days she did nothing but

¹ Spinning wheel.

English lessons, and mastered far more of the rudiments than is usually done in such a short time. But on the fourth day the inevitable reaction began and the English books lay uncared for ever afterwards. Lakshmi's new mania was spinning. She bought a charka and for five or six days her new-born enthusiasm knew no bounds, but after this period the poor charka was left to sleep in a corner. Lakshmi even totally forgot about its existence till one day an elderly visitor came to the house after dusk and unwarily trod on the charka which span round ferociously and thoroughly frightened the visitor who was only consoled when Lakshmi brought a light and found the cause of the elderly gentleman's anxiety to be her own charka.

XXXVII. MOTHER-IN-LAW IS UNWILLING

THERE was a mother-in-law in a southern village who was treating her daughter-in-law disgracefully. Even in the matter of food the wretched woman would not give her daughter-in-law enough. Naturally, the daughter-in-law had no great confidence in her mother-in-law's good intentions towards her. One day, the poor daughter-in-law felt severe rheumatic pains in her right leg. The mother-in-law administered

a moderate branding on the part affected, and this gave some relief to the sufferer. The mother-in-law went out to take her bath shortly afterwards. The daughter-in-law thought to herself, 'I have got some relief even by this slight branding administered to me. I am sure to be totally cured if the whole leg were put in the fire for some time. Of course, my mother-in-law never wants me to be happy and so did not want me to be completely cured. That is why she did not put my leg in the fire or brand it all over thoroughly. I shall do it myself now that the wretch is away and surprise her disagreeably when she comes back.' So saying, the daughter-in-law thrust her affected leg into the fire in the oven. With a terrible shriek 'she drew it back again the very next minute but all too late. The wretched limb was burnt to the bone, and the poor daughter-in-law writhed in pain.

XXXVIII. I SHALL CURE EVERYTHING

A CERTAIN Ayurvedic¹ physician promised to cure every disease of one of his patients. He gave the unfortunate man a succession of potions

¹ An indigenous system of medicine.

and lotions the ultimate result of all of which was the patient's death. Some of the relations of the deceased man were furious and said, 'Look at that wretch of a physician! He promised to cure every disease and has brought about the poor man's death.'

'Friends,' said a cynic who was passing by, 'The physician has kept his promise. Now that this unhappy man is dead, don't you see that he is free from every one of his diseases?'

XXXIX. A PHILOSOPHER PHYSICIAN

AN Indian physician of the western school of medicine once sent a heavy bill for medical attendance on a poverty-stricken man who died in spite of, or in consequence of, his treatment. The relations of the deceased man, who were used to Ayurvedic physicians who took money only when a man was cured, were scandalized at this unusual conduct of sending a bill the very next day after a man's death for a single visit which had certainly produced no good whatsoever. They protested to the physician that his conduct was scandalous. He replied that he was a philosopher and added 'Men may live or men may die but a bill will always come.'

XL. AN ASTROLOGER'S COW

AN astrologer called Kesava had a pugnacious cow which was proving a menace to the children of the neighbourhood. The opposite-door neighbour of Kesava was a graduate and a teacher called Rama. Rama's child was constantly being threatened by the astrologer's cow. So Rama requested Kesava to tie up his cow in order to allow the children of the street to move about with safety. Kesava refused curtly to comply with this reasonable request and referred Rama to the law courts. Rama was too wise a man to take to such a doubtful and desperate remedy. After all persuasion was found to be useless, Rama adopted the following device :—He put up a blazing signboard on his house like this, 'A graduate gives astrological predictions free! Direct inspiration from a Mahatma!'¹ Hours of consultation 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Dont consult quacks when you have experts close at hand! Dont pay money when you get better advice free!' Kesava was an astrologer of the old school who had little education to boast of and who never gave a single prediction free. Still, he had a good clientele

¹ A great soul, an inspired man.

on whose payments he solely depended for his living. These clients generally used to wait on the pial of Kesava's house till they were called in one by one by that astrologer. These came to Kesava's house as usual the next day after the signboard was put up by Rama. As they sat on the pial, the blazing signboard attracted their eyes. Soon, all of them went to Rama since he was a graduate, had direct inspiration from a Mahatma and charged no fees whatsoever, three points in which Kesava was clearly inferior. Rama received them very courteously and referring to a book and some worthless cowries and from his general knowledge of human nature gave predictions which entirely satisfied his consultors. Every new man who came to Kesava's house speedily ratted and went to the opposite house. Even those who came between the hours of 10 and 4 preferred to wait for Rama rather than consult Kesava. Nothing that Kesava could do had any effect on them. Sarcasms and entreaties had alike no effect. At last, Kesava saw starvation staring him in the face if he did not make his peace with Rama. He went to Rama in the dead of night and offered to tie up the cow always or even to sell it away and implored him to stop his competition.

Rama took pity on the fellow and agreed. He sent away the stream of would-be consultants next day by saying that he was debarred from giving predictions by departmental rules which he had just then discovered, and Kesava got his client back again. Needless to say, the menace from the cow disappeared for ever.

XLII. THE WIZARD AND THE TWO DEVILS

ONCE upon a time, a wizard was boasting to a schoolmaster that he had rid a woman of the two devils which had possessed her. The schoolmaster asked him where the two devils had gone and was told that they had been sent to the neighbouring house.

'Why did you send the devils to the next house?' asked the teacher. 'You could have driven them away to some distant wilderness.'

'Ah,' replied the wizard. 'There were two difficulties in my way of adopting this course. Firstly, the devils may keep quiet if they get one house in exchange for another, but are sure to take revenge on me if they were driven to a wilderness where there are no human beings to be preyed upon. Secondly, unless the devils go from house to house, how am I to ply my profession and live?'

'Devils even are commercial commodities in India,' remarked the schoolmaster.

XLII. A SNAKE DOCTOR'S OCCULT KNOWLEDGE

A SNAKE doctor had a reputation of being able to say even without looking at any patient whether a snake bite was venomous or not. One day, a man knocked at his house and told him that his son who was serving in a place a hundred miles away had been bitten by a snake.

'What!' exclaimed the poor snake doctor in agony, 'My son! My son!'

'I have brought him here for treatment. He is talking to some people outside,' said the stranger.

'Ah,' replied the snake doctor recovering himself, 'the bite is not venomous, I can say that positively.' All people admired his occult knowledge.

XLIII. SIVAJI'S BEARD AND THE BOYS

THE great Mahratta leader Sivaji was fond of talking to children. One day, he was sitting under a shady tree and explaining to a crowd of little urchins how to make a fire with flints. He also told them how things like straw were easily cumbustible.

‘Will hair burn?’ asked one boy.

‘Of course, it will,’ replied another boy. ‘I saw my mother putting some refuse into the fire. There was some hair in it and that too burnt.’ A little while after, Sivaji had a short nap. The children were experimenting at fire-making. The boy who had seen hair burn wanted to demonstrate to the others the accuracy of his statement. So the boys created a fire and applied it to Sivaji’s flowing beard which was singed. Sivaji woke up and the malefactors ran away. After some time the mothers of the boys went to Sivaji and entreated him to forgive their children.

‘What have I to forgive?’ asked Sivaji laughingly. ‘I taught them something and they showed in their own childish way that they had learnt it. There is nothing in this to forgive.’

XLIV. ASOKA AND HIS VICEROYS

THE great Emperor Asoka once called all his viceroys to Pataliputra on the occasion of his birthday and told them that the best of them would be awarded a pair of valuable gold bangles. He then asked them all to state their respective claims. ‘Sire,’ said the Viceroy of Suvarnagiri, ‘I have trebled the quantity of gold sent to the Emperor from my province.’

'And I,' said the Viceroy of Ujjaini, 'I have doubled the revenues from my province.'

'And I,' said the Viceroy of Tosali, 'I have entirely crushed the spirit of the Kalingas.'

'And I,' said the Viceroy of Takshasila, 'I have kept the frontiers safe and reduced the expenditure of my province by one half.'

'And I,' said the Viceroy of Pataliputra, 'I have increased the expenditure two-fold and cut down the revenues paid by the people by one half. Formerly, a great sum was being paid to the imperial exchequer by my predecessors over and above the stipulated amount. Now all that money goes to the upkeep of additional hospitals, rest-houses, *viharas* and schools and to the dispensation of the knowledge of *Dharma*.'

'The Viceroy of Pataliputra gets the prize!' said Asoka. 'Mere sending of gold is not doing the duty of a Viceroy, nor is the decrease of expenditure or the increase of revenue or the defence of the frontier or the crushing of the spirit of a people. A viceroy represents me and I expect him to do his duty by the people entrusted to his charge. The real gold he can send to me is in the shape of more schools, more rest-houses, more temples, more *viharas*, more hospitals,

XLVIII. THE KING AND THE ASTROLOGER

A KING was about to undertake an important expedition against his enemy. On the day before the starting, the court astrologer, who was in the pay of the enemy, predicted certain defeat for the troops if they started on the day appointed or within two months after it. The scoundrel's object was to give ample time for the enemy to get ready for the war. The troops, however, believed in the astrologer and emphatically told the king that they would not start on the appointed day or within two months after it. The king was deeply chagrined. He knew that his only chances of victory were if he started on the day fixed. He did not want to allow certain prospects of victory to escape simply because of a troublesome astrologer. Still, he knew the superstitious nature of his troops. At last, he adopted a cunning device. He asked the astrologer when he would die. The reply was that he would die after thirty-one years. The king had the fellow killed secretly that very night and pointed out to his soldiers the next day how erroneous the fellow's predictions were.

'The man predicted thirty-one years' more

life for himself, he died yesterday,' said the king. 'So also, the fellow's prediction of defeat must mean a prediction of victory.' The soldiers expressed their readiness to start on the day originally fixed, and ultimately defeated the enemy who was totally unprepared.

XLIX. THE MAN WHO CONSULTED AN ASTROLOGER ABOUT A THEFT

A CERTAIN Hindu lost a hundred rupee note by theft from his house. He at once went and consulted an astrologer about it. The astrologer received a heavy fee and predicted that one or other of the man's close relations and friends about whom his consulter had suspicions, must have committed the theft. The Hindu left the astrologer confirmed in his dark suspicion. As soon as he went home, he stated his suspicions and the astrologer's predictions and roundly charged the relations and friends with having committed the theft. The formerly happy joint family became torn into factions, and several defamation suits were filed against the man who charged his relations and friends with theft. He had to spend more money on these law suits than he ever lost by the theft. At last, the poor Hindu

found his pockets considerably depleted, his friends gone, and the peace of the family departed for ever. All too late, he realized that a cunning quack but exploits our unjust suspicions.

L. THE SICK MAN WHO CONSULTED AN ASTROLOGER

A SICK Hindu went and consulted an astrologer as to what was the root cause of his disease. Like several others of his faith, he believed that astrologers could give correcter accounts of the causes of disease and its cure than doctors. The astrologer told the sick man that the disease was the cause of a certain God's displeasure, and advised him to propitiate the deity with a suitable offering. This was done, but the sick man did not get rid of his disease. Indeed, the malady became worse. Again, the unfortunate man sent for the astrologer who told him this time that a big devil was doing all the mischief and advised his client to sacrifice some animals to it. Thus, the poor patient went on paying fat fees to the astrologer and offering presents to several gods and devils in succession, but his disease only got worse and worse till one day he died. Only on his death-bed did he realize that an astrologer's doctoring is the surest prediction of death.

LI. AN ASTROLOGER AND HIS FEES

THERE was a celebrated astrologer in Malabar who was supposed to know everything past, present and future by means of his occult powers. A great and rich scholar of the neighbourhood wanted to test him. He assembled a large body of people and invited the astrologer to his house. As soon as the astrologer had seated himself in his usual posture for casting cowries, he asked the scholar, 'What is it you want me to predict first?' 'First, tell me what I am going to pay you at the end of the consultation,' replied the scholar. The astrologer was in a fix. If he named any sum, the scholar was sure to give a different sum. After a minute's thinking, he said, 'It is too simple and trivial a thing for using my occult powers.'

'Nothing is too simple or too trivial,' said the scholar. 'If it is really so simple, it won't cause you the least trouble.'

'Well,' replied the astrologer in a fix. 'It is also a figure variable according to your pleasure.'

'Not quite true,' replied the scholar. 'The fee that I am going to pay you at the end of the consultation must be a fixed amount, either zero or some amount. The event of my payment is

only one and you ought to be able to predict it. Is it not because of uncertainty that people consult you?' 'I can't predict these simple things,' said the astrologer at last. 'If you cannot predict these simple things,' replied the scholar, 'how can you predict those complex events which are hidden in the wombs of futurity? This proves that your whole profession is a humbug.'

LII. THE MAN WHO INSURED HIS LIFE

A CERTAIN simple ryot was once persuaded by a pushing agent of a third-rate insurance company to insure his life for three thousand rupees at the rather low premium of fifty rupees per year.

'You see,' the agent had said to him, 'you are a poor man unable to save more than fifty or sixty rupees per year. At this slow rate you cannot save anything grand for your wife and children to live upon after you are dead. I make you this offer. You pay us fifty rupees per year and pay the first premium down and die the next minute. We pay your wife or whomsoever else you appoint as your heir three thousand rupees in cash on the merest application stating that you are dead. No onerous delays, no risk of suits, no long correspondence.' 'How does the company

profit if it gives me three thousand rupees for my fifty rupees per year?' asked the ryot. 'I am not sure to live for sixty years more.' 'Oh, no,' replied the agent, 'you are sure to die within four or five years. For aught I know, you may die the day after you are insured. Only, take care to die after you have paid the first premium, and you get three thousand rupees for fifty rupees. As for the company's losing, don't you know that the old idea that a company should carry on solely for profit has disappeared for ever? The desire to do good to poor people like you and to provide for destitute widows and children like yours are the only objects of our company. So, now, you decide whether you insure yourself or not.'

'What if one particular year I have not got money to pay my premium?' asked the ryot. 'Pay it the next year or the year after that or whenever you will. Who is going to bother about that if you are really unable to pay up? Don't you know that this special company to which I belong exists only for your good and not for its own selfish profits as the other companies?' replied the agent. This settled it. The ryot got himself insured for three thousand rupees after the requisite formalities, and paid the first premium. After that, he was looking forward every day for

his predicted death. Instead of death what actually arrived was the next date for the payment of the premium. The poor man had no money with him just then since his crops had failed. He thought that he would give it next year when he had a good crop. Had not the agent told him not to worry? But the company sent a letter threatening to cancel his policy and to confiscate his first premium unless he paid up within a month. The poor fellow saw the agent who however told him 'what can I do? How can the company continue to do benefits to people like you if you don't pay your premia regularly?' So the poor ryot had no other go but to borrow at a heavy rate of interest and pay up the premium within the prescribed date. Year after year the premia were paid with great hardship. Nothing deterred the ryot from committing suicide except the warning of the agent that not a pie of the insured amount would be paid by the company in case of suicide. After thirty years of regular payment, the poor man died leaving his wife, six children and a debt of Rs. 1,500 behind. He had asked his wife at the time of his death to at once write to the insurance company, get the Rs. 3,000, pay off the debt of Rs. 1,500, and maintain herself and the children with the remaining amount.

The widow did as directed. After a month of constant expectation and three reminders, the company replied calling for proof of her husband's death from a gazetted officer. The poor woman had to go in the middle of her sorrow and get this certificate after much trouble and expense. When this was sent, the company wanted to have a certificate from a first-class doctor that the death of her husband was not from suicide. This certificate cost the widow much more time and expense. When at last it was procured and sent, the company wrote to say, after another delay of a month, that her creditors had asked them not to pay her till they had got decrees in courts. The civil suit in courts took years, and all this time the poor widow and her children were on the verge of starvation and driven to beggary for their sustenance. At last, three years after her husband's death, when the suits against the poor widow were not yet decreed, the insurance company was declared insolvent and ordered to be wound up. An Official Receiver was appointed, and he, after another delay of one year, declared a dividend of four pies in the rupee. The widow got only Rs. 62-8-0 in return for all the money her husband had paid as premia. She was in her turn declared a bankrupt, her house and other

belongings attached by the Official Receiver, and herself and her six children turned out into the streets to live a life of perpetual beggary.

LIII. BHRIGU AND BRAHMA

THE saints in heaven were not a little put out by Sri Krishna's saying in the *Bhagavad Gita* that of all great saints He was Bhrigu. They asked Vishnu to prove to them that Bhrigu was superior to them. So Vishnu assembled all the saints except Bhrigu and asked them to plunge themselves in deep meditation closing their eyes. When some time had elapsed, Vishnu called out, 'Oh, saints, Brahma¹ is coming.'

All the saints at once opened their eyes and asked Vishnu, 'Where is He? Where is He?'

'He is not visible to you,' said Vishnu. 'You know not how to see Him.' Then they all went to Bhrigu who was plunged in deep meditation in his *asram*.²

'Bhrigu,' said Vishnu, 'Brahma is coming.' Bhrigu said nothing and never paid the least heed. His eyes were closed as before.

¹ God in the form of the Creator.

² Hermitage.

‘Bhrigu, Brahma is coming,’ said Vishnu again in a louder voice. Bhrigu neither opened his eyes nor spoke.

‘Bhrigu, don’t you hear?’ said Vishnu a third time in a still louder tone. ‘Brahma is coming. Don’t you want to worship Him?’

‘Which fool is it that speaketh to me?’ asked Bhrigu still with his eyes closed. ‘Is not Brahma within me, am I not seeing and worshipping Him always? How can He who never was absent come? Every sensible man looks for God within himself and not without.’

‘Do you see?’ said Vishnu to the other saints. ‘Do you see the reason why I preferred Bhrigu to you?’

LIV. A TEACHER AND HIS IVORY HANDLE KNIFE

THERE was a teacher who had a knife with a white handle which he insisted on regarding as ivory though all the others thought that it was but dog-bone. The teacher was always feeling miserable when anybody referred to it merely as the knife or the white penknife and felt deeply grateful whenever anybody called it ‘the ivory-handle penknife.’ He used to keep this knife always in his front pocket. One day, he got two

unripe mangoes early in the season and placed them on the class table. Then he began to write something on the board. Some mischievous boys coveted the mangoes and stealthily took one of them, cut it to pieces and ate it. The seed they placed on the table alongside the uneaten fruit. When the teacher had finished his writing on the board, he came and sat on his chair. He saw only one mango left and so asked in surprise 'where is the other mango?'

'Sir, you cut it with your ivory knife and ate it and put its seed alongside the other mango,' said one of the ringleaders of the theft. 'Did I?' asked the teacher half in doubt.

'Yes, Sir, and you put the ivory knife back in the front pocket,' said the boy.

'I see,' said the teacher quite reassured. 'How I forget things of late!'

LV. THE PRIEST AND THE WITCH

IN a village in Malabar there was a priest who used to be called in by mothers often to scare away the effects of the evil eye on their children by repeating holy hymns, putting sacred ashes, etc. Unfortunately, there was a rival to the priest in this art in the village. This rival was an old lady who had a reputation of being a witch.

The priest always used to caution his clients against calling the witch, half from sincere belief that she would only do evil, seeing that she derived her power from the Devil, and half from business motives. One day, the priest administered his usual caution to a young lady whose child was suffering from a particularly malicious evil eye.

'Why?' asked that lady, 'will her spells prevail over yours?' 'I fear so,' said the priest. As soon as the priest had gone, the lady said to herself, 'Surely, God is more potent than the Devil. If the witch's spells are more powerful, she must have more of God's power in her than this feeble priest. After all what we want is effective cure whether it comes from God or the Devil. Besides, every good thing comes from God. Cure is a good thing and so it must certainly come from God. Hereafter, I shall call in the witch only.' From that day forwards she called only the witch on such occasions and persuaded others also to follow her example.

LVI. LET THE DEVIL COME TO ME

THERE was a man who stoutly maintained that there was no devil. A fervent believer in devils wanted to dispel this unbelief. 'Come to the

burning ghat¹ at midnight with me,' said he to the sceptic, 'and I shall show you the devil.'

'Why should I come there?' asked the sceptic. 'Let the devil come to me, I won't go to it. Surely, your devil is not so feeble as to be unable to leave the burning ghat?'

The believer went to the burning ghat at midnight and, after gruesome sacrifices, sighted the devil. He implored it to go to the sceptic.

'I can't,' said the devil. 'That is the law of my Nature. Unless a man comes to me, I am powerless to approach him.'

LVII. THE SCEPTIC IN SORCERY

A CLEVER sorcerer went to an Indian village and was much annoyed at the criticisms of a sceptic in the shape of the village postmaster. This worthy seriously maintained that there was no such thing as sorcery. The sorcerer wanted to put the sceptic to ridicule. He told him that he would not be able to break a properly incantated mud pot even with a six feet pestle. With this, he took a frail and very brittle mud pan and repeated several incantations over it. The postmaster took up the challenge and

¹ The place where dead bodies are burnt.

boasted that he never had any the least belief in sorcery. Then he went and bathed in the tank, smeared ashes profusely over his body, went to the temple and prayed fervently and then came to the place where the mud pot was. Even the pestle was bathed, smeared with turmeric and saffron and adorned with flowers and leaves which had been offered to God. After all this was done, the postmaster took up the pestle and, in the midst of a large crowd, delivered a terrific blow on the pan crying out 'Govinda! Govinda!'¹ The blow took effect, and the pan was broken into a hundred fragments. When the postmaster turned in triumph to the sorcerer, he found that man laughing instead of being chagrined. 'My dear fellow,' said the sorcerer to the postmaster, 'you have a great belief in sorcery in spite your professions. Otherwise, who would aim at such a frail pan like this with a six foot pestle? Where was the necessity to bathe, to say prayers, to call upon God, etc.? If it were an ordinary pan, you would have broken it by simply throwing it down. Because you believed that the pan got added strength from my incantations you did all this.'

¹ A name of God.

LVIII. A TIGER AND A MAN

A MAN once twitted a tiger for its extreme cruelty.

‘O, wretched beast,’ he said to the tiger, ‘how many poor animals do you kill for your selfish purposes! Are you not ashamed of all this cruelty?’

‘We tigers are not more cruel than you men,’ replied the tiger. ‘We only kill strange animals. We don’t rear up animals with seeming fondness like you and then one fine day kill them for filling our bellies thus grossly abusing the trust reposed in us and committing an act of the basest ingratitude. Again, we never kill our own species whereas you are very ready to massacre thousands of your fellow human beings for fancied or real selfish interests of yours. How then, O man, are we tigers worse than you men?’

The man kept absolutely silent unable to reply.

LIX. THE HEAD-HUNTER AND THE ARYAN KING

A CERTAIN Aryan King of Kamarupa¹ was horrified at the practice of head-hunting prevalent among the Nagas.² He sent for the Naga Chief

¹ Assam.

² A savage tribe of Assam.

and asked him whether he was not ashamed of the inhuman practice of head-hunting prevalent among his people.

'Sire,' replied the Naga Chief, 'are you ashamed of waging wars?'

'No,' replied the King.

'Well, then, we are saved,' replied the Naga Chief. 'A man who delights in waging war cannot blame us head-hunters. For, after all, what is war but organized head-hunting?'

LX. THE MILLIONAIRE AND THE CANNIBAL

AN American millionaire went on a visit to New Guinea and was scandalized at the fact of there being cannibals in that island. He sent for the Chief of a cannibal tribe and asked him whether he was not ashamed of the horrible practice prevalent among his people.

'Where is the harm?' asked the Chief calmly. 'You eat the poor man's food, I eat the poor man as food. All his misery disappears when I eat him up whereas his misery only begins when you eat up his food.'

LXI. THE BEGGAR WHO WAS REFUSED ALMS

A RICH man was habitually giving alms to a beggar for forty years. After that time, he

became convinced that indiscriminate charity only demoralizes its recipients and so resolved to stop giving alms stating the reason for his decision. 'Why, then, did you give me alms for these forty years?' asked the beggar indignantly. 'You have completely demoralized me by doing so and hence are bound to give me alms till I die. But for your forty years of continuous alms-giving I would have taken up some work or other and earned my living. Your action has deterred me from this and made me now quite useless except for begging. You can't back out now. You are morally bound to continue to give me alms till my death.'

The rich man recognized the justice of these remarks and complied with the request of the beggar as a special case.

LXII. I KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERY SCIENCE

A KING wanted to give a very rich reward to the most learned of all scholars of repute. So he sent for all scholars from far and wide and assembled them in his court-hall. Then he began examining each on his learning. One said that he was well-versed in grammar, another that he knew astronomy most, another that he was

specially well-read in philosophy, and so on and so forth. One eager pandit thrust himself in front of all the others and said, 'Why, O prince, do you put yourself to so much trouble? I am decidedly the most learned of all these men here.'

'What science do you know?' asked the king.

'I know everything about every science,' replied the pandit.

'You fool,' said the king indignantly, 'some of my messengers must have brought you here by mistake mistaking you for a scholar which you are not. True learning is accompanied by humility which you have not got. Clear out of the presence of these learned men!'

LXIII. THE THREE SANYASIS

A KING of old sent an ambassador with three *sanyasis* to a neighbouring king asking him to pick out the best, next best, and the worst in half an hour. The king to whom these holy men were sent adopted a simple device. He called the first *sanyasi* in and seated him on a gold throne by his side and talked for five minutes with him. Then he sent him away and called the second and seated him on a silver throne and talked with him for five minutes. After that, he sent him away and called the third and seated

him on a copper throne and talked with him for five minutes. Then he sent him also away. After five more minutes, the king went with the ambassador to the three *sanyasis*. He called the first aside and asked him, 'Of what material was the throne on which you sat made?'

'I don't know,' replied he.

'Do you know on what thrones your two comrades sat?' asked the king.

'I don't' replied the first *sanyasi*.

The king then called the second *sanyasi* aside and asked him, 'Of what material was the throne on which you sat made?'

'It was made of silver,' replied he. 'And those on which your two comrades sat?' asked the king.

'I didn't enquire,' replied the *sanyasi*. The king then called the third *sanyasi* aside and asked him, 'Of what material was the throne on which you sat made?'

'Of copper,' replied the *sanyasi*.

'And those on which your two comrades sat?' enquired the king. 'My brother there,' replied the third *sanyasi*, pointing to the second, 'sat on a silver throne. I ascertained it from him. As for the first *sanyasi*, I never asked him since he was plunged in his own meditations.'

The king told the ambassador who was hearing all this, 'The first *sanyasi* is the best, the second the next best and the third the worst. The first was so intent upon God that he never noted the shining gold on which he was sitting, much less did he ask the rest on what thrones they sat. The second was worldly enough to note the material of the throne on which he sat though he was not vulgar enough to ask the rest on what thrones they sat. The third not only noted the material of the throne on which he himself sat but was also vulgar enough to enquire of the second on what throne he sat.'

LXIV. THE MAN WHO OFFERED TO TRANSFER DEPARTED SPIRITS FROM HELL TO HEAVEN

A CERTAIN quack went about the land announcing that he could transfer any departed spirit from Hell to Heaven. Many simple people, anxious to save the spirits of their ancestors from the dire tortures of Hell to which possibly they might have gone after death, paid enormous sums to the quack in order to ensure the joys of Heaven for their beloved dead. In a short time the quack became a national danger since the poor and the superstitious were being cheated

of their hard-earned money. The king of the country wanted to put a stop to the wholesale cheating practised by the quack. He imprisoned him in a cell and stationed a trustworthy sentry outside the door and asked the quack to escape if he could. The quack said, 'How can I escape when the cell is locked and a sentry is posted outside?'

'You see,' said the king to his subjects who had assembled in large numbers to protest against the action of their king. 'How can a fellow who cannot escape from an ordinary cell guarded by a single sentry cause thousands of departed spirits to escape from horrible cells in Hell guarded over by hosts of terrific demons?' All the people saw their folly and hung down their heads in shame. Then the king let the now harmless quack out.

LXV. A CARPENTER AND THE LAW OF AVERAGES

THERE was a carpenter who plumed himself on his knowledge of mathematics. One day he had to cross a river in a boat. A brilliant idea struck the carpenter. As soon as he entered the boat, he asked the boatman to sound the depth of the river at either bank and in the middle. The

boatman did so and told him that the depth of water at either bank was six inches and in the middle eight feet. The carpenter's eyes glistened, but he said nothing. As soon as he got to the other side of the river, he thought to himself, 'What a fool I was not to have ascertained these depths before! I could have then saved the two annas which I paid to the boatman. The average depth is only three feet, fancy! My height is five feet six inches, so I could have easily waded through and saved my two annas. Well, there is no use regretting the past. When I return, I shall wade through. But I shall not tell any other fellows about this discovery of mine. Why should they profit by my knowledge? So I shall cross the river alone after nightfall when the boatman has finished his work for the day.'

Thinking like this, the carpenter soon finished his business and then waited patiently till nightfall. Then he waded into the river saying, 'How useful is the law of averages!' It was alright so long as the carpenter was near the bank. But in his confident strides the poor man got into the depths before he was aware of what was happening. Caught in the eight-feet depth, unable to swim, the unfortunate carpenter was dragged helplessly along by the swift current and met a watery

LXVI. THE MAN DEVOID OF ANGER

TWO people were quarrelling at a village tank when a benevolent-looking man came and pacified both. Then he told the crowd at the tank that anger was one of the greatest enemies of man and that no man should become angry whatsoever the provocation. 'But it is impossible for human beings not to be angry at times,' said a young scholar. 'You are quite wrong,' replied the other. 'It is possible for the right kind of human being to control anger always. Look at me, I have never got angry and never shall though I have had the great provocations imaginable.'

'I see,' said the scholar. 'What may be your name, reverend sir?' 'Rama,' replied the benevolent-looking man beaming with good will. Then the talk turned to some other topics. After Rama had taken his bath and was about to go home, the scholar said 'Rama,'——'Yes', replied Rama. 'Rama,' said the scholar again.

'Yes. What is it you want?' asked Rama just a trifle impatient, 'Rama,——' said the scholar again without proceeding further.

'What the devil do you want, man, that you continually keep on calling me by name without telling me what you want?' asked Rama indignantly.

‘Rama——’ repeated the scholar again calmly.

‘What a d-d fool you are!’ said Rama becoming very angry. ‘I never saw such a stupid blockhead like you.’

‘Ah,’ said the scholar bursting out laughing. ‘In spite of your theories, you too get angry and that not always under serious provocation.’

LXVII. THE FROG AND THE HIMALAYAS

THERE was a solitary frog in a certain deep well which had many steps. The frog never went outside the well and so had no knowledge of the world outside but was none the less contented for that. One day, an elephant came to the brink of the well and, leaning over the parapet wall, entered into a conversation with the frog about the Himalayas. ‘It is a very high mountain,’ said the elephant.

‘Is it as high as the first step above me?’ asked the frog.

‘Far higher,’ said the elephant.

‘Is it as high as the second step?’ queried the frog.

‘Far higher’ was the reply. Then the frog went on raising the height by each successive step of the well but without satisfying the

elephant. At last, the frog said half incredulously :—

‘ Is it as high as the top of the parapet wall over which you are leaning ? ’

‘ Far higher,’ said the elephant.

‘ Get away, it is impossible,’ said the frog. ‘ Surely, you must be trying to fool me with your tall stories,’ and the frog dipped into the water.

LXVIII. THE MOUNTAINEER AND THE PLAINSMAN

A MAN from the plains once heard enchanting stories about the delights of living on hills. So he went and put up with a mountaineer on the top of a hill. The silence of the hills soon bored the plainsman, the intense cold at nights annoyed him, and an attack of malaria decided him finally to leave the hills at once. He also requested the mountaineer to go with him to the plains saying, ‘ Why do you remain in this God-forsaken place ? Come to the delightful plains and live a happy life.’ The mountaineer went down into the plains with his friend. In a few days, he got bored with the extreme noise made by people, he was oppressed by the heat of the sultry plains, and he was dejected at finding no wild animals to

hunt. He said to his friend, 'Are these the delightful plains you spoke about? I prefer my hills a thousand times' and went back to his mountain home.

LXIX. THE PERFECT WIFE

A MAN once went in search of a perfect wife. After an arduous search, he found such a lady who agreed to marry him. Both were married, and the husband was joyous beyond all measure at his having secured such a wife. One day, he told a friend that he was the most fortunate man on earth, that he had a wife who in beauty, virtue and all other good qualities excelled all other women on earth and that he was very proud of this fact.

'My dear,' said the perfect wife to her husband, 'pride is a demon, you should avoid it at all costs.' The husband felt this as a snub but kept silent.

Some days later, a naughty child threw a stone which hit the husband on the forehead, and blood flowed freely. He rushed after the urchin with a stick swearing to give it a jolly good thrashing. His wife caught hold of him and said, 'My dear, you shouldn't get so angry. Anger is one of the worst enemies of man. The child in its igno-

threw the stone at you, it is not for you to imitate it in its senselessness.' The husband felt this advice to be ideal but lacking in sympathy. Another day, the husband bought a basket of excellent mangoes and wanted to eat a dozen of them at one sitting. 'My dear,' said his wife, 'that would be gluttony, and no one should be gluttonous. Eat one or two fruits and be contented.' A doubt crossed the poor husband's mind whether he had after all been wise in marrying this perfect wife. Some days later, the husband got five rupees for doing hard work for which he had expected to be paid at least fifteen rupees. He was dissatisfied and expressed his dissatisfaction in no uncertain terms. 'My dear,' said his wife, 'you should never be dissatisfied. Contentment is the secret of happiness. Be contented, with whatever you get.' The husband bit his lips and remained silent. He was fast repenting of having married this perfect woman. The next day, his house was burnt down and he was grieving over it. 'My dear,' said his wife, 'do not give way to futile grief. A wise man should neither grieve nor rejoice.' 'What a blockhead I was in having married this perfect woman!' thought the husband to himself and cursed his fate.

LXX. MUST BE IN BED FOR SEVEN DAYS

A KING of old wanted to pass a law that any poor man who was in bed for more than seven days would be regarded as very sick and given meals free by the State. His minister became seriously alarmed and told the king, 'Sire, all the beggars and idlers will soon lie in bed for seven days pretending to be sick and impoverish our State by getting free food from it.'

'Those people will never accept my condition,' said the king. 'Bring the cleverest scoundrel among the idlers and beggars in our land and I shall prove to you that you are wrong.'

The minister brought the very idlest beggar in the whole land and told him that he would receive free food if he lay in bed for seven days continuously. 'What good luck!' said the beggar. 'I need no longer wander in search of food.'

'Mind you,' said the king, 'you should never stir out of your bed. Every one of your wants will be attended to by others.'

'What unheard of good luck!' exclaimed the beggar, and his face beamed with joy.

'Sire,' said the minister, 'my prediction is borne out.'

'Wait till the experiment is finished,' replied the king. So the beggar was put to bed and an

attendant was provided for attending to his wants and for seeing that he did not get out of bed. For the first day, the beggar was most joyous and never left the bed or wanted to leave it. The luxury of such a rest with such an attendance acted as an intoxicant on him. The next day, the sweetness lessened just a bit, but, still, was sufficiently strong. But the next day the beggar's legs began to yearn for a short walk. The beggar wanted to rise up from his bed but was prevented by the attendant who warned him about the *sine qua non* for getting free food. On the fourth day, the beggar prayed hard to be allowed to just go to the window for a few minutes, but to no purpose. Then, he again made a supreme effort and lay down for an hour or two without stirring. But all to no purpose. In the evening the beggar told the attendant that he wanted no free meals if they were to be purchased at the cost of not stirring out of the bed for three days more. 'Good Heavens!' said the beggar, 'I get free meals elsewhere and am at perfect liberty to wander about. Those meals taste better than these which I get here because I would also be more hungry. What appeared to be a light condition I find to be the most onerous imaginable. Give me back my liberty and I renounce all

right to free meals from the State.' Saying this, the beggar took his stick from the corner and rushed out of the door in precipitate flight before the attendant knew what was happening.

LXXI. A TOWNSMAN WHO RUSHED TO A FOREST IN DISGUST

A CERTAIN townsman was thoroughly disgusted with the many hypocrisies, insincerities and immoralities of town life. His heart yearned for the primitive forests where the sages of old had led such elevated lives. In a sudden burst of enthusiasm he left the town and its evils behind and rushed to the nearest virgin forest. The cool air of the forest and the songs of birds instilled great enthusiasm into the townsman who exclaimed, 'How I regret that I didn't take this step before! O, wretched town, who will inhabit thee if he is given a peep into the majestic forests?' In his enthusiasm the townsman jumped in sheer joy. A dozen thorns entered his feet and nipped his jumping propensities. With a yell he began to take out the thorns one by one. There was no chair to sit on, and the townsman had to sit on the bare ground, a thing he had not done for many years.

'Every rose has its thorn,' said he as he took

out the thorns one by one meditatively. One thorn had gone particularly deep and as he pulled it out a small stream of blood also came. 'I wonder whether it will prove septic,' said the townsman to himself in anxious tones, but there was no doctor or dispensary to go to.

'The forest has its own disadvantages,' remarked he pensively. 'Still, it is a lot better than the town.'

He sat there for an hour. The infinite silence disturbed him. 'I wish there were some sounds,' said the townsman to himself, 'though, of course, one doesn't want the senseless din of the towns.' Just then, a tiger's roar was heard. The poor townsman trembled like an aspen leaf. His one anxiety was to run away from this hellish forest. He lay flat on the ground like one dead and made many vows to God if he were saved from the tiger's jaws and restored to his city home. For two hours he lay in this miserable condition and afterwards, as the sun was setting, he saw two people going to the town with loads of firewood. He offered five rupees each if they took him to his house in the town. The poor coolies were only too glad to comply with his request and thus the townsman closed his one day's forest adventure with a net loss of ten rupees.

LXXII. TUKA RAM AND SIVAJI

THE great Mahratta Chieftain, Sivaji, sent a messenger to the celebrated religious teacher, Tukaram, inviting the latter to permanently take up his residence in his palace and be his adviser. Tukaram pleaded inability to comply with the request since all his time was consecrated to Vithoba of Pandharpur. Thereupon, Sivaji sent another message to Tukaram like this :—‘ Even in my palace you can serve Vithoba all the time.’

To this Tukaram sent the following reply :—

‘ A true servant of the King of Kings cannot be a servant of an earthly King.’

LXXIII. URGENT STATE AFFAIRS

ONE day, Sivaji wanted to see Tukaram. So he sent word to that famous teacher to go over to the court and see him. Tukaram’s reply was ‘ Let the King come to me.’ ‘ Go and tell him that I am engaged in most urgent state affairs and cannot come,’ said Sivaji to the messenger who repeated the message to Tukaram who was praying. ‘ Go and tell the King that I am engaged in God’s worship and cannot come,’ was the reply of Tukaram. On hearing this reply, Sivaji laughed and went to where Tukaram was.

LXXIV. RAMANANDA AND HIS BRAHMAN AND OUTCASTE DISCIPLES

RAMANANDA, the great religious teacher, had among his pupils an outcaste. This did not please one of his Brahman disciples who was constantly grumbling. One day, he went to Ramananda and requested him to dismiss the outcaste disciple. Ramananda refused, saying, 'He is a poor helpless fellow. I cannot dismiss him for his mere caste. Have you anything else to say against him?' 'Nothing,' replied the Brahman disciple. 'But is it not enough that he is a wretched outcaste?'

'God knows no outcaste,' said Ramananda.

'It is a question of his going or my going,' said the Brahman disciple. 'Choose.'

'I would keep the outcaste though I am sorry that you feel it to be your duty to leave me. You may get another *guru* (teacher) but he never. So I must keep him,' said Ramananda. The Brahman disciple thereupon left Ramananda and was applauded by a number of his obscurantist friends who had been his instigators from the very outset. For one or two days the Brahman disciple was the hero of the neighbourhood, but soon his fame, being purely negative, faded.

Some fifteen days after his ostentatious severance from Ramananda the Brahman disciple was almost completely forgotten. A month after this, the village elders wanted to celebrate the Ram Lila on a grand scale and invited Ramananda and his disciples including the outcaste to come and perform a *bhajana*.¹ The poor Brahman seceder was not even so much as invited to the celebration lest Ramananda should refuse to come. His former illusions disappeared, and wisdom dawned upon him. He went to Ramananda and fell on his feet recanting his errors and imploring his pardon which that magnanimous teacher readily gave.

LXXV. THE COUNTERFEIT SOVEREIGN AND THE GILT RING

A CLEVER scoundrel once took a counterfeit sovereign containing only seven and a half rupees worth of gold to a goldsmith's shop intending to pass it off as a genuine coin. He asked the goldsmith to give him a ring worth a sovereign. The goldsmith took the counterfeit sovereign and knew at once its real composition. He however said nothing but quietly took a ring which

¹ A religious procession with hymns and music.

appeared to be a sovereign ring and gave it to the scoundrel who packed off with it with the least practicable delay. 'What a fool that goldsmith is!' said the scoundrel to himself as he gleefully looked at the shining ring before him, but suddenly his face fell. The brass beneath the gold was to be seen in one spot. 'This wretched thing is a gilt one' said the scoundrel in rage. 'It contains scarcely one rupee's worth of gold whereas my sovereign contained seven and a half rupees' worth of gold. Oh, I am cheated of my six and a half rupees by this arch scoundrel! But what to do? If I point out his fraud, my fraud too will be out. So I have perforce to keep silent.'

LXXVI. THE DOCTOR'S ADVICE

THERE was in an inland country village an Indian doctor of the English school. He had a supreme contempt for indigenous herbs and medicines and persuaded the villagers that all their herbs and medicines were useless and that English medicines alone were of any good. The poor villagers believed in him, gave up all their old herbs and medicines, and asked him to indent for English medicines. These latter took a long time to come, and many died for lack of

any medicine. Some others had their diseases completely cured by the time the medicines came, but were still called upon to pay the exorbitant value of the medicines when they did come. The few that were still suffering from diseases refused to take the English medicines as soon as they heard their price. 'We shall go in for our own herbs and medicines which cost little or nothing,' declared they.

LXXVII. ONE GOD, ONE DEVIL

A CHRISTIAN and a Hindu argued about God. 'There is only one God,' declared the Christian, 'whereas you Hindus believe in many Gods.' 'I believe in one God with many forms,' declared the Hindu.

'Even for the sake of expediency, you should believe in one God in one form only,' declared the Christian. 'Hear the following story:—A Hindu and a Christian wanted to see which religion was better and both decided to test it by jumping into a deep well and calling upon their respective Gods to rescue them. The Christian jumped into the well first and called upon God the Father of all to rescue him, and was immediately rescued. The Hindu jumped into the well and called out "Rama! Rama!" Just as Rama

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was rushing to save him, the man called out "Siva, Siva, Mahadeva." Rama was put out and returned, while Siva came rushing to save the Hindu, flattered at being preferred to Rama. Just then, the Hindu cried out, "Krishna, Krishna!" Siva was put out and went away in anger, and Krishna came rushing, but the Hindu called on Subramania, and so on and so forth. Each successive God was about to save him when he called out another's name. Finally, the man died by drowning. Thus you see that even for the sake of expediency you should believe only in one God in one form.'

'I see,' said the Hindu. 'Do you believe in one devil or many devils?'

'Of course, in one Devil' replied the Christian.

'Believe in many devils were it only for expediency' replied the Hindu. 'Hear the following story:—A Hindu and a Christian were going on a journey together. The Hindu believed, as usual, in an infinite number of devils whereas the Christian believed only in one. When they reached a dreadful forest, the devils made a swoop on them. The One Devil gobbled up its believer in no time. But multitudes of devils fought over the right to the Hindu, who believed

in them all, and the Hindu escaped during this general civil war among devils. So believe in many devils were it only for expediency.'

LXXVIII. THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE MALABAR

A MALABARI employed in Bombay was boasting in time and out of time about the unique excellence of his native place, Malabar, which he alleged excelled every other place in every respect. This at last put out the genial Bombaywalah. 'Is it in every respect superior to Bombay?' asked the Bombaywalah. 'Immeasurably,' said the Malabari. 'Economically, socially, morally and intellectually, Malabar is ten thousand times better than this wretched town.'

'In that case, why did you come to Bombay to seek an employment?' asked the Bombaywalah. 'That Malabar could not give you a suitable job at home, does it not show that there is at least one defect in that perfect land?'

LXXIX. THE MAN WHO BECAME A SANYASI

A BRAHMAN had an infinite longing to imitate the Brahmans of old and become a *sanyasi*. So he one day abruptly left his wife and six children and went and sat under the peepul tree near the

tank and tried to concentrate his mind on God and God alone. But do what he will, his mind was firmly fixed on his house, wife and children. The next morning, one of his sons came to bathe in the tank. His father asked of him all the details about how the family spent the night. He made minute enquiries about his wife and the other children. Then he parted for a time from his son unwillingly. But he asked him to send one of his brothers or sisters now and then. Soon the peepul tree became the scene of a family conference. The whole village began to laugh at the *sanyasi* who was so immersed in his family affairs. That night, the new *sanyasi* resolved to return home and to resume the life of a householder. After darkness had set in, he crept into the house stealthily by the back door, and, falling on the neck of his wife, exclaimed 'My dear, the sinister experiment is over.'

LXXX. THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE FARMER

'WHAT is the use of your living on earth?' asked a conceited philosopher of a farmer. 'You don't know a scrap of philosophy and live much the same life as a tree.'

‘Well,’ retorted the farmer ‘I am a more useful member of society than you. I can live without philosophy, you cannot live without food.’

LXXXI. THE SUN'S HEAT

‘OH, wretched sun,’ exclaimed a pedestrian at midday on a particularly hot day in South India. ‘You make life intolerable.’

The sun wanted to teach him a lesson, and disappeared for a number of months together. Utter darkness fell upon the world. Trees died, water became unhealthy to drink, crops perished, and men's blood became impure. The pedestrian fell down on his knees and prayed to the sun to come back. The sun came at last moved by all men's prayers and said to the pedestrian :—

‘Oh, fool, instead of making life intolerable it is I who make it possible.’

LXXXII. THE MAN WHO LEFT HIS HOUSE BECAUSE OF RATS

A MAN was once greatly put out at the large number of rats inhabiting his house. He resolved to quit the wretched house and live in the open. So he went and squatted on an open space away from the house. For some time the change soothed and pleased him. There were no rats

there. But soon a chameleon came running to the place where he was. He thought to himself 'This is bad, but, after all, chameleons are better than rats and there is only one chameleon here whereas there are many rats there.' Presently, a centipede came along. 'What monster is this!' exclaimed the man. 'I never saw its like in the house. Still, I can easily kill it' and he took a stone and killed the centipede. Then it became dark and he lay himself down to rest. But countless jackals raised such a chorus that he had little sleep. At about midnight, the wild cats began to howl. The man was terribly frightened lest they should come and bite him. He mentally resolved to go back to his house at the first opportunity. Early in the morning, he woke up and saw a deadly cobra lying at a distance of one yard from him. With a terrific yell the man ran in panic flight saying, 'The rats are nothing compared with these horrible creatures,' and never stopped till he reached his house back again.

LXXXIII. SPARE THE ROD, SPOIL THE CHILD

THERE was a teacher in a small school in Malabar whose misfortune it was to have learnt

early in life the proverb ' Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child.' Like all semi-cultured people, he believed implicitly in the absolute truth of proverbs. At school there was no more conscientious teacher than he, none who desired more sincerely the welfare of the boys entrusted to his charge. But, unfortunately, no teacher won an equal notoriety for cruelty. The poor teacher clung to the proverb he had learnt, and many a student had cause to curse the author of the sinister proverb. When a student gave a wrong answer, down descended the rod on the devoted palm of the sinner, and, as the blows rained fast, the teacher used to say unctuously, ' Spare the rod, spoil the child.' Certainly, no child was spoilt in this teacher's class by the rod being spared. The passion for beating grew so much on this teacher that even when boys gave the correct answer he used to give one or two cuts with his cane saying, ' Spare the rod, spoil the child. If I spare the rod to-day, you will give a wrong answer to-morrow.'

LXXXIV. THE VILLAGER WHO BOUGHT A NEW UMBRELLA

A VILLAGER once saw an English umbrella with one of his wealthy relatives, and ever after that

his ambition was to buy a similar umbrella himself. He began to save money for this purpose and after a year saved enough money to buy it. He went to the nearest town and bought an umbrella after infinite choosing. He took the umbrella with the cover and proceeded to go back to the village. On the way, a heavy rain began to pour down. The villager at once wrapped up the new umbrella with his upper cloth and tucking the whole thing under his arm began to run. A fellow-villager, who was following behind, shouted out, 'I say, open your umbrella and let us protect ourselves from this rain.'

'Good Heavens!' said the other. 'My new umbrella will be completely spoilt. Pray give me your upper cloth too that I may protect my new umbrella still more securely.'

LXXXV. FROM BUTTER THEFT TO BIG THEFT

A SMALL child in a joint family contracted the habit of stealing butter, jaggery, etc., with the secret connivance and full approval of its mother who rejoiced at the extra advantages her child was getting over the other children of the family. Soon, this child became such an adept at this art

that his mother's pride at his ingenuity knew no bounds. 'Such a clever fellow must needs make a name when he grows up,' thought she to herself. When he grew up to be a boy, he was sent to a school where he began stealing pencils, books, etc. Many were the complaints which the poor mother received from indignant students and their no less indignant parents. 'These school-boy habits will go away when he grows up to be a man and comes to know the difference between taking stealthily one's own property and another's,' said the mother to herself. Alas for the poor mother, when the boy grew up to be a man, his evil habits only became confirmed. In a few years he became the most notorious thief, house-breaker and robber in the whole neighbourhood. His mother's heart was broken. One day she asked him with tears in her eyes. 'Why can't you leave off the evil habits you contracted at school, my boy?' and as she spoke this, her face was a picture of agonized grief. The robber was visibly moved. With sobs he told her, 'Mother, if it were only the habits I contracted at school, I can shake them off with an effort. But those other habits which I formed at home, those cling to me and I cannot shake them off try how I may.'

LXXXVI. THE THIEF AND THE ROBBER

ONE day, a thief and a robber had an argument as to who was morally the better.

Said the robber, 'I do not do underhand things like you ; all that I do is publicly with the full knowledge of the man deprived of the property. I rely on my superior strength and ability for my trade.'

Said the thief, 'Your trade depends on mere brute strength and requires no skill like mine. You not only deprive your victim of his property but also cause him bodily injury thus doing a double injustice. I am any day better than you.'

LXXXVII. THE STEP-MOTHER AND THE STEP-CHILD

A STEP-CHILD once asked its step-mother indignantly, 'If you were my mother, will you treat me so badly? Why can't you treat me like your own child?'

'If you were my child, will you speak to me so badly?' asked the step-mother. 'Why don't you treat me like your own mother?'

LXXXVIII. MOVE ASIDE OR I SHALL BEAT YOU

THERE was a Brahman in Malabar who was always accustomed to shout out to the poor

outcastes on the roads, 'Move aside, or I shall beat you.' If the poor outcastes did not move to a long distance, the fellow used to thrash them soundly and then take a bath to get rid of the pollution. So terror-stricken were the outcastes that at the very sound of his voice they used to go long distances off even though they were sometimes carrying heavy loads on their heads. One day, a rowdy wanted to teach the Brahman a lesson. He stationed himself in the centre of the road as the Brahman was returning from his bath and shouted out in strident tones, 'Move aside, or I shall beat you.' The Brahman stood stupefied, but, seeing the rowdy rushing on him, hurriedly ran a long distance away from the road.

LXXXIX. THE INDIAN AND THE SNAKE

'OH, wretched reptile,' said an Indian to a snake. 'What horrible creatures you are! Do you know that your tribe murders twenty thousand human beings per year in India alone?'

'And, pray,' said the snake, 'let me know the number of snakes killed per year by human beings in India alone. I daresay the number must be at least three times as great as the number of human beings killed by snakes.'

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XC. THE WORD AND THE BLOW

A MAN once called another a 'thief.' The other thereupon gave him a thundering blow which made him shed bitter tears of grief. After some ten minutes, the man who received the blow said to the other, 'Your blow is still giving me pain.'

'Your word also is still giving me pain,' replied the other.

XCI. THE CROW AND THE CRANE

A CROW and a crane had both a child each. The crane was very proud of its child and taking it to the crow asked the latter, 'Will you ever have a child as white as mine?' The crow at once brought its child and asked the crane, 'Will you ever have a child as black as mine?'

XCII. CONTRADICTORY PRAYERS

'OH, God, why do men die at all? Free us from Death,' prayed the men.

'Oh, God, why do men die so slow? Cause some more to die every-day,' prayed the undertakers and coffin-bearers.

XCIII. THE LAWYER AND THE ROBBER

ONCE a lawyer met a man in a railway compartment and asked him casually what his occupation was.

'Robber' was the prompt reply. When the lawyer's astonishment had abated a bit, he asked the robber whether he was not ashamed to call himself a robber.

'What may be your occupation?' asked the robber.

'I am a lawyer,' replied the other.

'Ah,' said the robber, 'you get money from people because of your superior brains, I get money from people because of my superior strength. Why should I find fault with you or you with me?'

XCIV. THE LAWYER AND THE RYOT

A LAWYER once complained to a ryot that though he worked eight hours per day he used to get only fifty rupees per month.

'Ah,' replied the ryot, 'what is your condition compared to mine? I work ten hours per day and don't get even ten rupees per month. And here you are working eight hours per day and being discontented with fifty rupees per month!'

XCV. CIVILIZATION AND THE SHIRT

A RYOT once went to a town and found all the people wearing shirts and looking upon him as a savage since the upper portion of his body was

uncovered. He was a poor man who could ill afford a shirt, but the thirst to be civilized was so strong in him that he resolved to forego milk and to buy two shirts instead. He got two shirts made to measure, and strutted about his native village proud of his new-born civilization. But, as the months rolled on, the effect of the non-consumption of milk began to manifest itself clearly. The ryot had not the strength of old to plough or water his fields. Month after month, the shirt also got looser and looser as his body began to get thin. At last, the ryot said to himself one day, 'This wretched shirt is becoming my shroud. I shall have no more shirts in future but honest milk to nourish my body,' and threw away the two old shirts in disgust.

XCVI. THE BRAHMAN HOTEL-KEEPER AND THE SASTRAS ¹

A BRAHMAN hotel-keeper and a social reformer were arguing about the question of doing away with the disabilities of the depressed classes.

'These disabilities must exist,' insisted the hotel-keeper, 'because they are laid down in the holy *Sastras*.'

¹ Hindu Law Books.

'The holy *Sastras* don't mention any such disabilities,' said the social reformer. 'But even if they do, their provisions must be brushed aside as being inapplicable to our times.'

'Never,' replied the hotel-keeper. 'The *Sastras* apply for all time. Every letter of the *Sastras* is sacred and must be obeyed. Nothing in the *Sastras* is untrue.'

'In that case,' said the social reformer, 'you will lose your caste, for the *Sastras* say emphatically that a Brahman who sells food ceases to be a Brahman.'

'Where, where?' asked the hotel-keeper.

The social reformer pointed out the relevant passages.

'After all, you are right,' said the hotel-keeper. 'These *Sastras* are but the effusions of empty brains.'

XCVII. THE MAN WHO PLANTED THE PLANTAIN AND THE MAN WHO PLANTED THE COCOANUT

TWO men began agricultural operations. One planted a plantain tree and the other a cocoanut tree. In a year the plantain yielded its fruit. The man who planted it went and ridiculed the

other saying, ' I am already reaping the harvest. What a fool you were in planting a cocoanut tree ! ' The other kept silent. In five years the cocoanut tree bore fruit and year after year the man who planted it used to gather an abundant harvest with little or no trouble. The other man's plantain tree was, of course, extinct after yielding its crop. Year after year the cocoanut tree planter used to mock the other saying, ' I am reaping a yearly harvest with no trouble at all. What a fool you were in planting a plantain tree ! '

XCVIII. THE MAN WITH THE SPADE AND THE MAN WITH THE WOOD-KNIFE

TWO men went out to clear and dig up some land infested with bushes. One had a spade and the other a wood-knife. Each wanted to be entirely independent of the other's help. The man with the wood-knife cleared some area easily, but found it impossible to dig with his wood-knife. The other found it easy to dig but very difficult to clear the bushes with his spade. At last, both were tired out and resolved to co-operate with one another. Soon the wood-knife cleared a large area and the spade dug it up and made it ready for planting.

XCIX. THE SAVAGE WHO BECAME
A TOWN LABOURER

A SAVAGE was once so glamourised of civilization that he left his native forests and became a mill-hand in a town. The precarious earnings of a cooly discouraged him, and the loss of independence weighed him down. No longer did he have the savage equality of the forests. The employers and capitalists regarded him as a hand, and even a foreman treated him like a dog. If the poor savage strayed into any man's garden, he was hounded out and threatened to be prosecuted. The problem of private property in land puzzled and tormented him. In the town too he was fast becoming a slave to vices like opium-smoking and beedj¹ smoking. One day, the poor savage concluded that life in the forests was much better than life in a town where everything, including water and fresh air, was to be had only for money. He left the town and the mill and ran back to his forest. But, alas, the evil training in the town made him unsuited for savage life. He hankered after beedies and opium and the various recreations of a town. He found it impossible to live in the forest and impossible to live in

¹ Small country opium shops.

C. WHICH IS THE GREATEST TEMPLE?

SOME Hindus were one day discussing as to which was the greatest temple in India.

'Of course, it is Tanjore temple,' said one. 'It will be hard to beat it in size and beauty.'

'What about Madura?' asked another. 'It is at least equally big.'

'Cease your discussions,' said a third. 'The greatest temple is assuredly the Viswanatha temple at Benares though it is far smaller than either of the temples you named.'

The two others had to agree that the temple of Viswanath at Benares was really the greatest.

CI. THE CHILD IN THE INFANT SCHOOL
AND THE INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS

AN Inspector of Schools inspected an infant school and asked a small boy what sum would be got by multiplying seven and eight. The boy began to laugh outrageously. The more the Inspector pressed for the reply, the louder became the laugh. The Inspector at last gave up the attempt as hopeless and left the class for another class. When he had left, the teacher asked the boy why he was laughing so boisterously.

'Ah,' said the boy, 'I was told that the Inspector was a very learned man. But here is

he asking me what seven into eight is, being himself ignorant of such a simple thing as that. Ha! Ha! Ha!'

CII. THE QUACK AGRICULTURIST REFORMER AND FORESTS

ONCE a semi-educated man settled down in a rustic village and began to undertake agriculture on what he considered to be up-to-date lines. He persuaded all the villagers to listen to his superior wisdom and cut down all the trees in the neighbouring forests. His object was thereby to make thousands of more acres available for cultivation. The growth of ages was cut down and disposed of in two years. After that period rains began to become scantier owing to the denudation of the forests, almost all the underground springs in the locality were dried up, firewood became hard to procure, and even the lands cultivated formerly did not yield anything like their former yields. Ryots had to leave the village in batches and what was once a fertile area became a barren tract.

CIII. THREE PEOPLE WHO SAW GOD

THREE people went to a sage and told him that they had all seen God. The sage asked them to describe how God looked like.

'Oh,' said the first man, 'God's form is most wonderful. He has a thousand faces and thousands of eyes, hands and feet. He is refulgent like a crore of suns put together.'

'God is pure like crystal,' said the second. 'From His mouth come only words of divine wisdom and truth, from his eyes flows an infinite love. He is Truth and Knowledge. He has no end, He is imperturbably calm, always blissful and pervading everything in the universe. How shall I describe His smile or the infinite melody of His voice? His voice is a thousand times sweeter to hear than the music of our best musicians.'

'Well,' said the sage turning to the third, 'describe God to me as you saw him.'

'I have seen God,' replied the third man, 'but I cannot describe Him. I feel in my heart of hearts what He is, but it is impossible to describe Him in human language which is wholly inadequate for such a purpose.'

'Ah, you alone have seen God,' said the sage. 'The others have only described Him conventionally like so many others who have not seen Him.'

CIV. HITTING THE MOON WITH A ROCKET

A CERTAIN professor wanted to hit the moon with a tremendous rocket across the space. 'I

shall strike the moon' he said, 'with such force that we shall know things about the space beyond.' So he made grand preparations, and at last one day in the presence of thousands of people sent his giant rocket flying into the air. The rocket went only a few miles and came down again.

'Was the moon struck?' asked an ignorant woman among the crowd. 'No,' replied a wag. 'Instead of the professor striking the moon, the moon struck him.'

CV. THE NEW ENERGY

A PROFESSOR once proclaimed that he had discovered a new energy which would blow the world to atoms in a second if properly directed. Many good and simple men were gravely perturbed at this dangerous discovery. The professor's rivals challenged the genuineness of his discovery and asked him to give a small demonstration by blowing a table to atoms with this new energy. The professor agreed. All assembled in a big hall and placed the table at a safe end. The professor stood opposite the table and carefully adjusted his mechanism for the generation of his new energy. Then a moment of tense excitement followed during

which the professor directed his new energy at the table. The table emerged from the ordeal unscathed. Instead of the table it was the professor's reputation which was blown to atoms.

CVI. THE TWO HOUSEHOLDERS

IN a remote country part there were two houses opposite to one another. No other houses existed anywhere near. One night, two thieves entered one of the houses and began to steal the property therein. The householder woke up and, being assaulted by the thieves, called to his neighbour for help. The neighbour heard the cry and thought to himself, 'Why should I go and interfere and be beaten for my pains? The thieves are not coming to steal my property.' So he bolted himself securely within his house and turned a deaf ear to the frantic cries of his neighbour. The thieves took away all the property of his neighbour and departed after giving the unfortunate man a sound drubbing. Some ten days later, the two thieves came again and broke into the house of the other householder. The man woke up and frantically shrieked for help to his neighbour. The neighbour said 'Why should I help you who never helped me? Suffer for your sins,' and

shut himself securely in his house. The thieves stole all the possessions of the unfortunate man, gave him a very good beating and departed.

CVII. THE WOMAN POSSESSED OF THE DEVIL

A CERTAIN woman in a village was supposed to be possessed of a devil, and a devil-dancer was called in to exorcise it. The fellow came, and, as usual with his class, began to beat the poor young woman with a cane. Her husband was very angry at this and the consequent agonizing cries of his wife. He demanded of the wizard the reason for his beating. The wizard replied, 'I am not beating your wife, I am only beating the devil in her. I shall conquer the devil very soon.' With this, the fellow again began beating the hysterical woman. The husband lost his temper, and snatching the cane from the wizard gave him several blows right and left. 'Why do you beat me?' asked the terror-stricken wizard. 'It is not I who beat you but the devil in me,' replied the husband. 'Conquer this devil also if you can.' The poor wizard despaired of conquering this assertive devil and took to a precipitate flight leaving even his cane behind.

CVIII. THE MAN AND HIS CONCUBINE

A MARRIED man, who had his wife living, began to keep a concubine. When he first formed his liaison with her, she asked him, 'Alas, why do you forsake your wedded wife like this?'

'I tell you,' said the man, 'marriage is nothing. The only thing that counts is love. Where love calls, we must go.' Some one month later, when the man had become thoroughly infatuated with the concubine, she left him off and formed a liaison with another man.

'Oh, faithless wretch,' said her former lover to her, 'why dost thou abandon me?'

'The only thing that counts is love. Where love calls we must go,' replied the concubine and shut the door in her former lover's face.

CIX. THE TREE AND THE PLANK

A MAN who did not know how to swim once lost his foot-hold while bathing in a flooded river and was being swept along the current when he climbed up a tree some ten yards from the bank and managed to escape being drowned. For some minutes, nobody came to the river bank and the man thought to himself, 'How long shall I have to wait till I am rescued?' Just then, he saw a plank floating down the river closer to the

bank than the tree. 'Ah,' thought the man, 'this plank is nearer the bank and is moreover moving towards it. I shall quit this wretched tree and cling to the plank and thus reach the bank soon.' With this, the man left his hold on the tree and sprang on the plank which gave way underneath him and slipped from his grasp. The unfortunate man was unable to keep his head over the water and was drowned.

CX. THE COOK AND THE TWO SETS OF DISHES

THERE was a corrupt government servant who was getting much money every month by way of bribes. He loved sumptuous meals dearly and ordered his cook to prepare two sets of dishes daily. In the course of a few years the government held an enquiry into the fellow's corruption and dismissed him from service. Thereafter, he had only the earnings of his past years minus the heavy costs incurred by him during the protracted enquiry. He resolved to regulate his expenditure according to his income, and so called his cook and said, 'Look here, I won't have two sets of dishes per day hereafter. I have lost my job and will be content with only one set of dishes.'

'As you please,' said the cook.

For the next month, the dismissed official ate only one set of dishes putting a great curb on his greedy tongue. At the end of the month he was surprised to see that his household expenses stood just as high as before in spite of his abstinence. So the next day he walked straight into the kitchen and found to his indignation two sets of dishes ready.

‘Why did you cook two sets of dishes?’ demanded he angrily of his cook. ‘Did I not tell you that I would have only one set of dishes?’

‘So you did,’ replied the cook calmly. ‘You said that you had lost your job and would be content with only one set of dishes. I obeyed you and gave you only one set of dishes. But since I have not lost my job I was not content with one set of dishes and so have been cooking the two sets as usual for my sake.’

The dismissed official was speechless with rage. Then taking the cook by the tuft he gave him several thundering blows and said, ‘You too shall lose your job to-day. Get away, you wretch.’

CXI. UNAPPROACHABILITY AND THE TIGER

A VERY orthodox Brahman from Malabar used to insist that no Nayadi¹ outcaste should go

¹ The lowest of the outcastes.

within a hundred yards of him. He used to enforce this rule rigorously by meting out exemplary punishments to those outcastes who infringed this rule. Gradually he became notorious among the outcastes for his oppression. One day, he was travelling through a forest when a tiger rushed on him. There was a Nayadi near by. The Brahman called out to him to go and save him from the tiger.

‘I should never come within a hundred yards of you. I am a Nayadi and the lowest of the outcastes,’ said the Nayadi and went his way. The tiger pounced upon the Brahman and tore him to pieces in no time.

CXII. THE BLIND MAN AND THE GREAT PAINTING

ONCE a great painter finished his masterpiece and exposed it in his studio for public gaze. Great crowds rushed into the studio. All admired the wonderful production very much and expressed their opinion that it was the greatest work they had seen and that they had seen nothing like it before. A blind man heard all this praise and rushed into the studio. He ran his hands over the famous painting and exclaimed, ‘Pooh ! this sticky thing is what people admire so much !’

CXIII. THE GOLD-MINER AND THE FARMER

A MINER working in the Kolar Gold Fields once said to a farmer, 'What a dolt you are! Why can't you dig for gold instead of digging up mud and stones?' 'I grow vegetables and cereals,' replied the farmer. 'A fat lot you make out of these vegetables and cereals!' exclaimed the miner in ridicule. 'Ah,' said the ryot, 'but I satisfy a more elemental craving than you. None can live without vegetables and cereals whereas one can live without gold. Besides, the vegetables and cereals I grow are my own and not a capitalist's like the gold you dig up. Again, I am a wheel by myself and roll very much as I like whereas you are a wheel in a machine with thousands of wheels and must therefore roll much the same as the other wheels do. Last, but not least, my hopes are from above whereas yours are from below. Hence I prefer to be a farmer.'

CXIV. KRISHNA DEVA RAYA AND THE
MINISTER'S ADVICE

KRISHNA DEVA RAYA, the celebrated Emperor of Vijayanagar, was almost continuously engaged in bitter wars with the Muhammadan Sultans of the Deccan. One day, one of his Ministers

said to him, ' Oh, great king, I have always admired your wisdom, but one thing has always puzzled me. You are continuously fighting against our enemies the Muhammadans, but still you allow many Muhammadans to live and prosper in your capital city, you give Muhammadans responsible posts, you even enlist them in your army and contribute heavy sums towards the services in the mosque constructed in the centre of this great city at great expense from the State. This is very strange. The proper thing would be to pull down this mosque and massacre or at least exile all the Muhammadans in your vast dominions.'

The great king smiled and said :—

' Simply because an enemy's dog bites you, are you therefore to kill your own faithful dogs for their mere sin of belonging to the same tribe? By killing or oppressing my faithful Muhammadan subjects I should be only showing myself unworthy to be a king who ought to be scrupulously just in his actions. Again, if I pull down the mosque and kill the Muhammadans for the crime of their belonging to a particular religion I shall create distrust even among the Hindus who will think that if I should by any chance become a convert to

another religion I shall mercilessly kill them and pull down their temples regardless of justice. A king should do nothing which is not just.'

CXV. THE FANATIC'S REQUEST

A MUHAMMADAN fanatic of Tippu's time was wroth at the Sultan's employing Purnayya, a Brahman, as his prime minister. So he went to Tippu one day and told him, 'Great King, pillar of the faith, why is it that, though a devout Mussalman, you employ an infidel as your prime minister? Why can't you appoint a Mussalman to this post?' To this Tippu replied, 'Friend, if there is a Muhammadan with half the capacity of Purnayya, bring him to me, I shall only be too glad to employ him.'

'There is none such' replied the fanatic.

'Then, persuade Purnayya to become a Mussalman and I shall be gladder still,' said Tippu 'Purnayya will never become a Mussalman,' returned the fanatic. 'Then, I cannot do anything in this matter,' replied Tippu, 'for to employ a Mussalman without even half the ability of Purnayya as prime minister of Mysore would be to make it impossible for a Mussalman to rule Mysore.'

CXVI. AN INDIAN AND ENGLAND

‘AH,’ said an Indian after finishing his tour in England, ‘this country is not half so good as India.’ ‘How so?’ asked an Englishman. ‘Because,’ replied the Indian, ‘there are no huge forests or wild animals here. The mountains and rivers here are far smaller, the climate is colder, the language less musical and the manners fantastically uniform and rigid. Besides, there are no graceful banyan trees and peepul trees. All the trees here are naked for half the year.’ ‘You are a far worse man than I am’ remarked the Englishman.

‘How so?’ asked the Indian.

‘Because you are shorter, darker and fatter than I,’ returned the Englishman. ‘Besides, your eyes and hair are black whereas my eyes are blue and my hair red. Again, my arms are longer than yours and my nose shorter.’

‘These are only differences of physique and do not in any way denote superiority,’ replied the Indian.

‘Ah,’ replied the Englishman, ‘what you considered as the points denoting the superiority of India were also points of difference and nothing more.’

CXVII. RANJIT SINGH AND THE
CONQUEST OF HIND

WHEN Ranjit Singh¹ was still fighting for supremacy among the various Sikh chieftains, Jaswant Rao Holkar fled to his court and requested him to help him against the English who had driven him from his territories in Central India.

Ranjit Singh was unwilling to leave his favourite projects in the Punjab and plunge into an uncertain and dangerous expedition in the lands to the south. But the sirdars² were of a different mind. They said to him, 'Go to war on behalf of Jaswant Rao. Our army is strong, our soldiers brave. Soon, instead of realizing your petty ambition of conquering all the Sikhs, you will be master of all Hindustan except the Sikhs.'

'What is the use of that?' asked Ranjit, 'even if it is possible. Hindustan can be held by me only with the power of the Sikhs. Without their powerful backing the rulership of Hindustan will be to me only the way to the scaffold.' 'But the English have only Hindustan and yet they are not ruined,' urged the Sirdars. 'Each tree draws its nourishment from its roots,'

¹ A famous Sikh ruler called the Lion of the Punjab.

² Nobles.

returned Ranjit. 'Cut me from the Sikhs, cut the East India Company from England, both of us shall fall even like trees severed from their roots.'

CXVIII. KOHINOOR AND BEAUTY

THE great Ranjit Singh when almost about to die resolved to present the celebrated Kohinoor which he loved so dearly to the idol of Jagannath at Puri. One of the most beautiful dancing girls at his court went to him and said, 'Great King, it is such a pity that Kohinoor, the most beautiful gem in the world, should adorn an ugly idol like that at Jagannath.'

'Where is the harm?' asked Ranjit. 'An ugly man like me has been wearing Kohinoor so long. Where is the harm if an ugly god wears it now? Don't you see that there is something in this that I who would never have consented to part with this jewel to the fairest woman in the world yet part with it for giving it to this so-called ugly idol? An idol which extorts so much devotion cannot be altogether ugly.'

CXIX. ALL GOVERNMENT IS EVIL AND A WHOLLY UNNECESSARY EVIL

'BROTHERS,' said an orator to an assembly, 'all Government is evil and a wholly unnecessary